PLACES: A GEOGRAPHICALLY-ORIENTED MEMOIR

By

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Over the past couple of years, I have read quite a few histories of American cities, states, and regions. In some of these, I have encountered the idea that Americans have lost their sense of place – that we move about too much and that the trend toward national chains of seemingly identical restaurants and retail establishments has rendered the whole nation homogeneous, so that it makes no practical difference to daily life whether one is in Maine or California. And this, presumably, renders us indifferent to our surroundings. In contrast, these authors hold, our ancestors, and perhaps the current inhabitants of a few isolated backwaters, were (or are) deeply rooted, with a stubborn love for their surroundings and an abiding loyalty to them.

I suppose I ought to qualify as a typical placeless American, since I have lived in several places and have been attached to none of them to the extent that I couldn't be happy – and eventually at home – elsewhere. At the same time, I think I have a very strong sense of place: each of the places I have lived is quite distinct in my mind, with its own peculiar flavor and feel.

Now, it may matter what we mean by "sense of place." As used in the books I have alluded to, "place" seems to include not only physical and natural characteristics – the lay of the land, the plants and animals, the weather – but also the people and their culture. When I began to write this, I thought that my sense of place is mostly – but not entirely – physical and natural. I have always been a scenery junkie. I look out the windows of airplanes. When I'm on road trips and it's somebody else's turn to drive, I never sleep – I look out the windows at what's passing. I love maps: I read them for pleasure. I'm a birder: I enjoy stalking down a trail, moving through my surroundings like a fish through water, alert for every sudden movement, flash of color, or shape that doesn't quite belong, that isn't a leaf or a branch and might be a bird. I dream about places – almost always ones I have never seen in waking life – and these dreams almost never involve any interaction with other people. I am also sensitive to architecture and landscaping – to culture made visible. But, in general, I have little sense of group solidarity where people are concerned. I have always hated pep rallies and tend to be suspicious of partisanship. Hence, I have little sense of attachment to the people in my vicinity other than my family and friends. I'm not partial to their dialects and accents. Hearing the same old jokes, stories, and opinions does not give me a deep sense of comfort; it bores me. As a result, I thought, my sense of a place is usually more concerned with what it looks, feels, and smells like than with its people and their customs.

But as I began to write about the places I have lived, I realized that people and culture do matter a great deal to me, however alienated I may sometimes feel. Indeed, the very alienation is a clue: my sense of a place reflects the life I lived there; I enjoyed myself more in some places than in others. The enjoyment, or lack thereof, was largely the effect my experience of the local culture, and that cultural "feel" had a great deal to do with my impression the place. I set out to write about the places I have lived, but I ended up writing a very subjective account of how I lived in those places. The result might best be described as a geographically-oriented memoir.

I have lived in five places long enough to have distinct impressions of them. I was born and raised in Florence, Alabama. I spent the better part of four years in Nashville, Tennessee as an undergraduate at Vanderbilt University. I was a graduate student for six years at the University of California Berkeley, in two periods separated by two years in the Army, during which I was stationed in Newport News, Virginia. Finally, I have spent the last forty-two years (following my second stint at Berkeley) in San Diego, California. For me, each of these places has its own distinct character.

FLORENCE, ALABAMA

Florence was my first place. I lived there continuously, in the same house, until I went away to college at eighteen. After that, I was home in the summers until I went away to graduate school four years later, although I spent most of one of these summers at ROTC summer camp at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Midway through my junior year at Vanderbilt, my parents moved from the house where I grew up to a brand-new house in a new subdivision a few miles east of town. After I graduated from Vanderbilt, I visited home nearly every year, usually for a week or two at Christmas or in the summer, until both my parents had died; after that, I was there at least twice in the next four years. In 1995, we sold the house, and my sister Nancy and her husband, who had been living there, went to Albania as missionaries. Since then, I have been back twice to high school class reunions, once, just passing through, on a road trip with my brother in 2015, and finally for a brief visit to scatter Nancy's ashes after she passed away in 2017.

My family consisted of my parents, my brother Rod, my sisters Nancy and Eleanor, and me; I was the youngest by far. We were living in Florence because my dad was a civil engineer who worked for the unit of what was then the federal Bureau of Public Roads (now the Federal Highway Administration) that was in charge of direct federal construction of roads in the Eastern United States. He occasionally was out of town working on other projects, but the Natchez Trace Parkway, which passed near Florence, was his life's work. The Natchez Trace was a pioneer road that ran from Natchez, Mississippi to Nashville, and the parkway began as a Depression-era public works project that dragged on for about seventy years. My dad didn't live to see it finished. Florence was near the midpoint of the parkway and that was where the Bureau had located its headquarters for the project.

Because it was my first place, Florence defined for me what is normal. It had the right kind of trees, the right kind of birds, the right kind of flowers, and even the right kind of weeds. Other places might be more beautiful or more interesting, but they always seemed to me to be a little unreal. Their trees might be bigger, their flowers more exotic, or their birds more diverse, but they just seemed a little artificial, as if they were a stage set or a museum display.

Physical Setting

Florence is located in the northwest corner of Alabama, on the north bank of the Tennessee River, about fifteen miles south of Tennessee and thirty miles east of Mississippi. It is the county seat of Lauderdale County, which stretches for about sixty miles along the northern border of the state. Across the river to the south are Colbert and Lawrence Counties, and to the south of Colbert County, Franklin County. To the north are the Tennessee counties of Hardin, Wayne, and Lawrence. Florence is connected by highway with Memphis (US 72, the Lee Highway), Chattanooga via Athens and Huntsville (also US 72), Nashville via Columbia, Tennessee (US 43, the Jackson Highway), and Savannah, Tennessee (Alabama 20, the Savannah Highway). South of the river, US 43 goes to Tuscaloosa and ultimately, Mobile. Florence is served by a spur rail line from Columbia, Tennessee; in my day, this was operated by the Louisville and Nashville Railroad and crossed the river to connect with Southern Railway lines to Memphis, Chattanooga, and Birmingham, but the bridge has since been demolished.

Florence is built on an eroded plateau above the river. On the west, the city is bounded by Cypress Creek, and in my early childhood, the northern limit of development was Cox Creek, a tributary of Cypress Creek that runs east to west about four miles north of the river. By the time I graduated from high school, the built-up area had spread well north of Cox Creek and was moving to the east out US 72 toward Shoals Creek (officially Shoal Creek, but I never heard it called that) about five miles east of downtown.

The Tennessee River is the major physical feature of the region. It flows generally from east to west across northern Alabama, but as it approaches the Mississippi state line, turns abruptly north to cross Tennessee and Kentucky and empty into the Ohio River at Paducah, Kentucky. Historically, the major feature of the river in the vicinity was Muscle Shoals, a stretch of shallow, swift water just to the east of Florence that extended about twenty miles upstream. How Muscle Shoals got its name is a matter of local legend and conjecture: one of the legends was that the Indians said, “It take heap big muscle to paddle up shoals,” but a more likely explanation is the presence of the freshwater mussels that are common in the area. My guess is that it was indeed the result of mollusks and misspelling.

Muscle Shoals is now buried under the waters of Wilson Lake, formed by Wilson Dam, which is located just upstream from Florence, but it has given its name to the entire region, including Florence and the Colbert County towns of Sheffield, Tuscumbia, and Muscle Shoals. Just downstream from Wilson Dam is another short stretch of rough water known as Little Muscle Shoals, which is bypassed by a barge canal leading to the locks at Wilson Dam. Otherwise, all of the Tennessee River in the vicinity of Florence is slack water, part of a series of lakes created by dams constructed by the Tennessee Valley Authority. Pickwick Landing Dam is located about fifty miles downstream in Tennessee; Pickwick Lake extends as far upstream as downtown Florence. Wheeler Dam is located about twenty miles upstream from Florence at the head of Muscle Shoals.

Florence is near the intersection of three of what are variously referred to as landforms or physiographic regions. Florence itself, and most of the Tennessee Valley in Alabama, is in the Interior Low Plateau region, which extends northward through Middle Tennessee and most of central and western Kentucky. North of the river, the land slopes gradually upwards to the Highland Rim and then down an abrupt escarpment to the Nashville Basin. A few miles south of the river is an escarpment that marks the boundary of the Appalachian Plateau, and just to the west is the boundary between the Gulf Coastal Plain and the other two regions. The boundaries of these three regions meet (at least according to some sources) at a point in southwestern Colbert County. The presence of these different landforms makes for considerable variety of topography and soil type, and hence plant and animal life; and this diversity fired my imagination as I was growing up. There was a little bit of everything, in a modest sort of way.

We had mountains – well, actually they were escarpments at the edges of different levels of the Appalachian Plateau, but we called them mountains: Tuscumbia Mountain, Spruce Pine Mountain, and so on. We had lakes – of course, they were artificial, created by the TVA dams on the Tennessee River. We also had the river, which is pretty big – although it was free-flowing for only two or three miles downstream of Wilson Dam at Little Muscle Shoals. There were islands in the river. We had waterfalls – not very spectacular ones, it was true – and the one I was most familiar with was actually somewhat artificial: it was on the cliff on the south side of the river just below Wilson Dam and it had been created by the rise in the water table caused by the impoundment of Wilson Lake. The Tennessee Valley is underlain by limestone, and portions of the area are karst formations, so we had caves and sinkholes and a creek that ran underground for a portion of its course – although none of the caves was spectacular enough to be commercialized and I was never in any of them.

There were hardwood forests in the valley and on the Highland Rim just north of it in Tennessee, and mixed pine-hardwood forests on the Appalachian Plateau and the Coastal Plain – in all, nearly a hundred different kinds of trees. Down in Franklin County, there was even a canyon, known romantically enough as The Dismals, that sheltered a few specimens of northern trees leftover from cooler times. There were the usual resident and breeding birds of the middle parts of the eastern United States and many that bred farther north were there during migration. There were flowers, both wild and cultivated, that bloomed from late February through November. There were fireflies and various kinds of butterflies and moths – and of course, plenty of less desirable insects: mosquitoes and grasshoppers and cockroaches and wasps.

We had swamps – Coffee Slough, the biggest of them, was located alongside the river a little downstream from Cypress Creek; it was at least partially created by the backwater from Pickwick Lake, but it was a proper Southern swamp, lined with cypress trees and harboring cottonmouths (but alas, no Spanish moss – we were too far north for that). In keeping with its transitional location in the natural world, Florence is at the limit of the range of the bald cypress in the Tennessee Valley: the last of them grow along Cypress Creek; they can be found downstream from there but not upstream.

In one thing only were we deficient: large wild mammals and game birds. Although deer and wild turkeys were introduced during my adolescence, in my childhood, hunters were confined to doves, quail, squirrels, and rabbits – but local place names testified to the glories of the past: Bear Creek, Panther Creek, the Elk River, the Buffalo River, Swan Creek, and a little farther afield, the Duck River. I always regretted that I had not lived in the days of the virgin forests, when the trees were really big and there were bears and elk and panthers and great flocks of passenger pigeons.

But the trees were big enough, and there were plenty of them. The climate was humid, and plant life was lush, if not rank. Rainfall was a little in excess of fifty inches per year. In the summer, it was hot and humid, and there were frequent thunderstorms. In the winter, it was cool and damp. Most years, it would snow once or twice, but rarely more than an inch or two at a time. In my school days, we looked forward to snows because nobody was really prepared for them, and the schools would almost always close for the day. Only once do I remember there being a white Christmas, and that didn’t amount to much – maybe an inch at most on the ground Christmas morning. The more typical winter pattern was clear and cold with frost, followed by warming with clouds moving in, followed by rain, followed by a cold front and back to clear and cold with frost. Spring weather tended to be unstable, with quick temperature variations and heavy rains in March and April; fall was a little drier and less variable.

The most important manmade feature in the area was Wilson Dam. In my day, Wilson Dam was operated by the Tennessee Valley Authority, but it actually predated TVA – sort of. It was begun during World War I to provide power for munitions factories but was left unfinished at the end of the war. Its other major purpose was to improve navigation on the Tennessee River by flooding Muscle Shoals. Barge tows would bypass the swift water of Little Muscle Shoals, just below the Dam, by means of a canal, and pass the dam by means of locks. Originally there were two locks in series, but during my childhood, these were replaced a single, larger lock that was billed at the time as the highest single-lift lock in the world. After World War I, there had been talk of privatizing the government-owned facilities at Wilson Dam – one potential buyer was Henry Ford – but nothing came of that except a brief land boom in the area of what is now the city of Muscle Shoals, where for years there were streets with curbs, gutters, and sidewalks running out through the cotton fields. When TVA was created during the Depression, it took over and finished Wilson Dam, converted the munitions plants to nitrate and phosphate fertilizer development works, and began building dams elsewhere on the Tennessee River and its tributaries, including Wheeler and Pickwick Landing Dams.

Florence had three main retail business districts: the downtown district that centered on Court Street; the North Florence business district around the Seven-Points intersection on North Wood Avenue, about a mile north of downtown; and the East Florence business district along Royal Avenue, about a mile east of downtown. Downtown, there was one local department store, a couple of banks, a number of clothing and furniture stores, and a couple of movie theaters. There were three supermarkets – A&P, Kroger, and Hills – all in close proximity to one another on North Court Street. There was also a farmers’ market that operated on Saturdays. It was referred to as the “curb market” but, contrary to its name, it was housed in a large, open building with a bare concrete floor. What I remember most about it was how noisy it was. This was a source of fresh produce and other rural products – for instance, Christmas trees. It was located somewhere downtown, but I don’t remember exactly where.

The local architecture was mostly of the ordinary variety. There were no high-rise buildings in town – when I lived there, the tallest was four or five stories – and the commercial buildings were typical of the times. My childhood was the heyday of the brick ranch-style house, and these were spreading out through the woods and fields as the town grew. And it did grow fairly rapidly during the 1950s and 1960s. And even when the growth slowed down, it continued to spread out, as was common everywhere at the time. Besides the ranch houses, there were the (mostly brick) bungalows that had been popular from the 1920s through the 1940s. Also, there were some Victorian houses surrounding the downtown area. At the time, they weren't regarded as treasures; rather, they were judged to be ugly and old-fashioned, and they were either repurposed (one was used as a funeral parlor) or torn down and replaced by modern buildings or parking lots. Of course, attitudes eventually changed, and the surviving examples now constitute historical districts, complete with historical markers testifying to how remarkable they are. And then, tucked away in the old-rich Riverview Drive neighborhood, there was a truly remarkable modern house that had been designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

And, it being the South, we had a few antebellum mansions scattered around, both in town and in the surrounding countryside. The most remarkable of these was the Forks of Cypress, located a little northwest of town. It featured a columned veranda on all four sides, and the columns were said to be made of "horsehair and molasses," among other ingredients. When the Forks subsequently burned down while I was away at college, it became clear from the ruins that the horsehair and molasses were ingredients in the plaster that covered the columns; structurally, they were made of brick. The rest of the antebellum houses were more ordinary. I remember that my fifth-grade class visited at least four more of them in the course of a field trip, and there were others. In addition to the mansions, there were several less pretentious buildings in and around downtown that dated back to the first half of the nineteenth century, some of them to the founding of the town around 1820. And there was one, a former tavern, that predated the town, having been built in the 1790s. It wasn't very remarkable looking. When I was a child, it was being used as a private residence, but it was later turned into a museum and tourist attraction.

One reason for the presence of antebellum mansions in the vicinity was that the portion of the Tennessee Valley in Alabama – at least the part in the Interior Low Plateau region – was plantation country before the Civil War. The prime cotton land lay on both sides of the river in a band ten to twenty miles wide that stretched from about ten or twelve miles west of Florence to Huntsville. In western Lauderdale county, it occupied what is known as the Riverbend area, between the river and the Gunwaleford Road, a county road that connects Florence with a place (it is hardly even a village) called Smithsonia, on the river about ten miles from town. The cotton country also extended north of the Gunwaleford Road up roughly to the Waterloo Road, another county road that connects Florence with Waterloo, a little town on the river about twenty-five miles downstream.

One particular part of the plantation country had a special significance in my mind. This was an area known as Colbert's Reserve, located west of Florence in the vicinity of Smithsonia. The "Colbert" in the name referred to George Colbert, a half Chickasaw-half Scot who operated a ferry across the Tennessee River on the Natchez Trace in the early nineteenth century. I'm not sure in what sense it was a "reserve," but given that Colbert had inherited his business instincts from his Scottish ancestors and was known to drive a hard bargain, I suspect that what happened was that when the Chickasaws ceded their lands, he held back this tract for his personal use, and that he later sold it at a tidy profit to prospective planters. In any case, it had a sort of nebulous air of mystery or romance in my mind, as if it had a profound history of some sort – maybe something noble or tragic, but I didn't know what – there was just something suggestive about it. It was karst country, full of sinkholes, and in the late 1950s there were old houses out in the fields that were subsequently torn down. One of these was along the Gunwaleford Road and featured solid brick ends with double chimneys. Google Earth has a picture of a similar but more substantial house that has survived; this is the William Koger place, located in the area north and east of Smithsonia.

Social and Cultural Features

The cheap power provided by TVA from the dams, and later steam and nuclear plants, was fundamental to the local economy as I knew it growing up. Florence itself was mainly residential and commercial: of the towns in the Muscle Shoals area, it had by far the largest population, and it had a reasonably prosperous downtown business district. It was also the regional educational center, since it was the site of a college, known in my early childhood as Florence State Teachers College, and subsequently as Florence State College, Florence State University, and now, the University of North Alabama. Otherwise, it had an old knitting mill in East Florence that made Fruit of the Loom underwear (among other things), a small meat packing plant, a small cheese factory, a ceramic tile plant, and a variety of other light industries. The big employers that were there to exploit the cheap electricity were located on the south side of the river: the TVA fertilizer works, Reynolds Metals, several other electrometallurgical and chemical plants, a Ford factory that manufactured aluminum engine blocks, and a tire and rubber factory. Reynolds operated aluminum reduction and aluminum products plants and was by far the biggest employer. They are all gone now, although the Reynolds facilities are still in existence and are occupied by another firm – I don't know if they're still used for the production of aluminum or not. And I have no idea what people in post-industrial Florence do for a living.

My sense of Florence's cultural identity is less distinct than my feel for its natural setting or my personal surroundings there. One reason may be that I was always a little bit of an outsider. My parents were from West Tennessee, and they felt that they were different from the local people, and (this was certainly true of my father) a bit better. West Tennessee was more "Southern," even though it was farther north, and North Alabama was more "Appalachian," even though the Tennessee Valley had been plantation country. The speech was more nasal, and the outlook more countrified, although Florence was larger than the towns they had grown up in and around. One hint of their alienation was the fact that for a considerable period during my childhood, we subscribed to the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* newspaper. If the idea was simply to get better non-local news coverage than the Florence *Times* provided, we could just as well have subscribed to the Birmingham *News*, but we didn't. Also, we were what I would call upper-middle-class in our cultural tastes: everybody in the family read a lot, and at one point we possessed a whole library of classical music albums (made available as a special promotion by a local supermarket, if I remember correctly) back when it was considered meritorious to appreciate classical music. And nobody in the family liked country music, despite the fact that one of the local radio stations broadcast a program called "Music RFD" every Saturday morning.

I think the other reason that cultural features are not what come most readily to mind when I think of Florence is that, since it was my first place, I had nothing to compare it with. The local outlook on life was just the way things were. I think this was particularly true where race relations were concerned – and since it was the South, we absolutely have to discuss race, since everybody knows it's the defining cultural characteristic of the region. Looking back on it, I realize that the whole society was pervasively racist, but as far as I was concerned – and I think this would apply to most of my generation – the racism was more a matter of habit than conviction. Florence survived both the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement relatively unscathed. The closest major Civil War action was the battle of Shiloh, which took place about fifty miles down the river. This occurred early in the war, in April 1862, and thereafter the Confederacy abandoned the region. In my day there were still old rifle pits to be found here and there in the woods, but they would have been related to raids and abandoned plans of defense, and nothing more. I don't remember hearing any horror stories about the Yankee occupation, and the number of surviving antebellum houses would confirm that there was no widespread destruction. During the 1950s and 1960s, I remember no demonstrations, sit-ins, protest marches, race riots, or Klan rallies, let alone any lynchings. When I was home from college one summer, I did witness one episode of police brutality, but it was directed at a couple of drunk and disorderly white men, one of whom had been firing a shotgun up in the air.

There were other reasons why race relations were something less than an obsession in Florence when I was growing up there. In the first place, the African-American population was relatively small, about fifteen percent in both the city and Lauderdale County. I'm not sure why this should have been so; as I have already mentioned, the area had been plantation country before the Civil War. But the black population had dwindled, in contrast to that of some similar areas in South Alabama, where it remained above fifty percent up into the 1960s. I'm not sure why this had happened.

A second reason was that there was comparatively little contact between the races, at least in the circles I moved in. Schools, of course, were segregated: although the separate school systems were abolished only a few years later, there was no desegregation locally until the year after I graduated from high school. Moreover, housing was segregated, at least in the part of town I lived in. So were churches. I remember as a small child asking about this and being told that we could go to their church if we wanted to, but they couldn't come to ours. I wasn't quite clear on the logic of this, but I accepted it as the way things were. Finally, neither my family nor those of my friends were wealthy enough to employ household help, so we weren't exposed to black maids, cooks, nannies, or gardeners and hence lacked that source of personal contact, so (supposedly) common elsewhere in the South. About the only place we saw black people was on the street or in the stores. Even there, all the old Jim-Crow restrictions were in effect: separate restrooms, drinking fountains, restaurants, waiting rooms – and of course there was back-of-the-bus, not that I did much bus riding. The result of all this was that I bore African Americans no ill will – but I didn't know any. And I think it was pretty much the same for most of the people I grew up with.

But – Jim Crow or no Jim Crow – the fact was that Florence's most famous native son was black. W. C. Handy, the great blues composer, had been born and raised there. Everybody in Florence knew about Handy. His boyhood home on West College Street had been made into something of a shrine and was one of the local points of interest for attracting tourists. In all the publicity about him, I don't recall that there was ever any hint of disrespect or any sense that he need not be taken seriously because he was African-American. And there seemed to be no sense of hypocrisy or irony on the part of the local white establishment in all of this – he was a local boy who had made good in the big world, and they were proud of him.

Now this account of racial mellowness, if not real harmony or justice, might seem strange in one sense, because in the 1930s Florence had been made the setting of literary fiction that had painted a very different picture. This consisted of a trilogy of novels by T. S. Stribling, an author once well-known but now largely forgotten. These novels – *The Forge*, *The Store*, and *Unfinished Cathedral* – were something of a big deal when they were first published: one of them even won a Pulitzer Prize. They are typical of the genre we might call the Twentieth Century Southern Novel – think Faulkner – and as such display an obsession with race, sex, violence, eccentricity, and dark family secrets, complete with accounts of rape, incest, murder, casual injustice, and mob violence. The Stribling trilogy includes accounts of one lynching, another one narrowly averted, theft, fraud, murder, and interracial rape and incest, all supposedly occurring in or around Florence. Needless to say, the townspeople were not amused, especially so since Stribling was something of a local product, having been born nearby (in Clifton, Tennessee) and having spent some time living in Florence. A group of them actually filed a libel suit against him, although they later dropped it.

If the lack of contact between the races led to a lack of awareness of local race relations, the same could not be said of the class distinctions within the white community. From the seventh grade on, all white children went to the same schools, except for a few who attended Mars Hill Bible School.

Consequently, we were in contact with the full cultural and social range of the white community. As I think about the distinctions within it, I am at something of a loss to identify their basis. I think the most fundamental divide had to do with education and was between the college-educated and those who were not. This requires a bit more explanation, though: the educated class not only included the families of adults who had themselves graduated from (or even attended) college but also those who expected to send their children to college. At the high school level (where it was most obvious) this meant that there was a divide between students in the college preparatory courses and those in the vocational courses. Among the non-college contingent there was a further distinction between the high school graduates and the dropouts. The law required all children to attend school until they completed the eighth grade or reached the age of sixteen, and I encountered some – including fifteen-year-old seventh graders – who were counting the days until they could quit.

Of course, this educational class stratification correlated roughly with several other distinctions. One of these was occupation, since professionals were in the educated class more or less by definition. Occupation, in turn, correlated with wealth, although not so closely. The educated class included not only well-paid doctors and lawyers, but also school teachers, who were poorly paid. The less-educated class, meanwhile, included factory workers, who were often paid better than people in the educated class, as well as laborers and farmers who were at the bottom financially. Among the poorer farmers there was even some illiteracy. When I was in college, I spent one summer "measuring cotton" – that is, recording the acreage of cotton on farms so the government would know if the farmers were within the allotments established by the price support system. In order to get paid for a farm visit, you had to get the farmer's signature on a form. I encountered one or two who had to make their X because they couldn't write at all, and quite a few more who could barely sign their names due to stiff fingers and a lack of practice. Of course, given the nature of their work, even rich farmers had stiff fingers.

There were further correlations with housing type, residential location, and religion. Within Florence, the less-well-educated tended to live either in East Florence or in older mixed neighborhoods (like the one I grew up in). Most of the educated lived either in big old houses in the older areas or in the new ranch-style houses on the outskirts. One area that was particularly popular among the well-to-do was Wilson Lake, particularly Shoals Creek. The development of the shores of Shoals Creek had started out right after World War II (or maybe before, in some cases) with the construction of fishing camps that featured rustic accommodations and were used only on weekends. These had eventually been upgraded to or replaced by regular houses, some of them quite large and elaborate, and a few owned by rich people from out of town. Living on the lake, which usually meant Shoals Creek, got to be the thing to do for well-to-do residents of the area.

Florence residents were generally better educated than residents of rural areas, and this was reflected in (and probably reinforced by) the quality of the schools. The Florence city schools were considered to be distinctly better than the county schools, and educationally-minded parents bore that in mind. I'm not sure exactly how pupil assignment worked, but the Lake People somehow managed to send their children to city schools, even though they lived outside the city limits. At the elementary school level, however, many of the most ambitious parents sent their children to Kilby Training School, the campus lab school run by the college. It was elite, if unconventional, and it took some effort to get in: there was only one class at each grade level and these were limited to thirty pupils each. Enrollment for new students was first-come-first-served, so parents needed to get their children in at the first-grade level if possible and to act promptly to do so when enrollment opened.

As for religion, there was a definite social hierarchy among Protestant denominations. At the top were the Episcopalians with their aristocratic traditions. Next came the Presbyterians, who were probably the most intellectual; and then the Methodists, who were well off because they included a good share of the business community; and then the Baptists and the Churches of Christ, who were the largest groups and included mostly plain people; and finally the Pentecostals, who were at the bottom.

Catholics and Jews were not numerous enough to have more than a single congregation each (unless you counted the Catholic Church out in St. Florian, a farming community about five miles out the old Jackson Highway), so there was no such hierarchy among them. That was the social hierarchy; if you considered the degree of religious fervor, the order would probably be more or less reversed.

One final correlation with social class had to do with enforcement of the prohibition law. Lauderdale County was bone dry throughout my childhood and adolescence. That is, the possession, sale, or consumption of all kinds of alcoholic beverages was illegal. This did not mean that there was no booze available. There were plenty of people of all descriptions who did not drink, but there were also plenty of people of all descriptions who did. Among the poorest and least educated elements of the population, whether white or black, the pattern seemed to be all or nothing: they were either teetotalers or drunks. Among the more respectable, especially the business and professional contingent, drinking was more likely to be of the moderate, social variety. So all sorts of people were in violation of the prohibition law – but you never heard of a businessman or a doctor or a lawyer being arrested for it. It wouldn't surprise me to learn that the police chief and the judge enjoyed a nip now and then. But poor people, whether white or black, did get arrested for violating the prohibition law.

So, we were educated class, mostly. My mother had a college degree; my father didn't, but he was extensively self-educated and worked as a professional. We read a lot, and we didn't even have a television – my father "didn't believe in them," although he had no objection to radios. My siblings and I all attended Kilby School; their enrollment there was interrupted when the family moved to the Washington, D. C. area during World War II, but I attended for all six years of elementary school. Religiously, we were about in the middle: my dad and brother were Methodists and my mother and the rest of us were members of the Church of Christ. But we lived in the wrong house. It was in a so-so neighborhood and it was not in the best of shape. I was ashamed of that house and as a teenager didn't want to invite my educated-class friends over – and practically all my high school friends were college-bound.

Now, as I think about it, I can't say that there wasn't a more conventional upper class in Florence. I know there were country clubs – the newest and most prestigious was at Turtle Point, at the mouth of Shoals Creek on the east side – and there was a tennis club (I think it was) out near Shoals Creek at Bailey Springs. So maybe there were dinner parties and balls and so forth for the upper crust, but if so, they were as much beyond my world as were the doings of the African-American community, and I paid no attention to them.

Growing Up in Florence

For most of my time in Florence, my family lived on Belle Meade Avenue. Our house faced west and was two rooms wide. On the south side were the living room, dining room and kitchen; on the north side were two full-sized bedrooms, a small hallway that doubled as a laundry room, the bathroom, and an old sleeping porch that had been enclosed and served as a bedroom, first for my brother, and when he left home, for me. Across the full width of the front of the house was a concrete porch; there was also a small back porch opening off the kitchen. There was an attic, too, but I don't remember ever being up there.

That house really wasn't that old; to the best of my knowledge, it had been built in the 1920s, so it wasn't much more than twenty years old when my family acquired it, but it seemed ancient – and shabby – to me. The walls were wooden siding, painted white, and eventually covered over by asbestos shingles. The floors were linoleum, and the boards under the linoleum were uneven so there was visible wear on the linoleum over the high spots. When I was very young, there were working fireplaces in the living room and the front bedroom and a coal-burning "warm morning" heater in the dining room. Later, a little before I started to school, natural gas became available in Florence, and we installed a gas floor furnace and stopped burning coal, plugged up the fireplaces, and (if I remember correctly) had the chimneys removed. And, of course, it wasn't air conditioned: such things were unheard of back when it had been built, and my parents had not seen fit to invest in window units, as had many of our neighbors.

Behind the house, at the northeast corner of the lot, there was a shed. Originally, it had served as a combination garage, coal shed and storage space. At some time before we acquired the property, a one-car garage had been added at the north end of the front porch and extending in front of it. When natural gas became available in Florence, we stopped burning coal, so during most my childhood, the shed no longer served as either a garage or a coal shed. It was built of unpainted wood with a tin roof; there was a raised floor under the south side, including the old coal bin, but the floor of the old garage area was just dirt. The shed was full of miscellaneous junk. I liked to play in the shed; later, when I was a teenager, we enlarged the back porch and constructed a little "house" out of the floor and roof of the old porch. These were attached to the side of the shed; the walls and door were made of plywood lined on the inside with cardboard. There were no windows, but there was a shelf at the top that you could lie on (just barely). How we got up there, I don't remember.

The old driveway extended behind the garage to the shed; between the house and the shed, it was on top of a concrete retaining wall that was about eight inches high or so. Just below the retaining wall and about halfway from the house to the garage, there was an old concrete fishpond shaped like a cloverleaf. By the time I can remember it clearly, it had been filled in and was used as a flowerbed. At one time, the area between the fishpond and the shed had been fenced in and used as a garden; however, there was a black walnut tree just behind the fishpond, and it soon grew to a considerable size and shaded out the garden, so the garden was abandoned and the fence torn down, except for some of the posts. As a child, I used the area under the walnut tree and behind the fish pond as a "digging place" – I liked digging in the dirt, pretending to build roads, and so forth. Along the line of the old fence on the south side of this area there were (possibly at different times, I don't remember for sure) a scuppernong grape vine that climbed up into the walnut tree, a lilac bush, and an elderberry bush. Also, one of the old fence posts had a bird feeder on it, but it mostly attracted squirrels.

The south side of the backyard was mostly open from the house to the alley at the back of the property. In my early childhood, there were two peach trees and an apple tree about halfway back, but they all died. Between them and the house were the clothesline and a fig bush that was over by the neighbor's hedge along the south property line. In about the middle of the area behind where the fruit trees had been was the place where we burned trash. Burning trash was my chore, and I managed to do quite a bit of playing in the process, such as fantasizing that milk cartons or cracker boxes were burning buildings. The best thing was when my dad brought home old asphalt sample cans from work. If you left them upright in the fire until the asphalt residue caught fire and then poured water into the can, you got a spectacular mushroom shaped cloud – just like an atomic bomb! Oh well, at least it was safer than what one of my neighbors across the alley did: he decided to see what would happen if he put a live .22 caliber rifle shell in the fire; fortunately for him, it was the shell casing rather than the slug that hit him in the head. Eventually, my dad planted a couple of black walnut trees – or was it more? – around the perimeter of this space. I know there were two back by the alley, one next to the shed and the other next to the hedge; there may have been another one by the hedge in the area where the old fruit trees had been. He also tried to get white walnuts to grow, but without success. He liked walnuts, and he planted them not only around the old house but also at the new one he bought when I was in college. You could call him "Roderick Walnutseed," I guess.

In the front yard, there were two pecan trees. The large one, that bore well and had big nuts, was by the driveway; the smaller one was on the other side of the yard and bore small nuts and not many of them. Of course, the squirrels got most of the pecans, but we did get quite a few off the bigger tree. Unfortunately, the big tree was too close to the driveway and eventually got cut down. Otherwise, there was at one time a clematis vine that grew up on the corner of the porch; and I seem to remember there being another scuppernong vine, but I'm not sure about that.

The neighborhood we lived in was located on the northeast side of town and was rather ordinary – I'd say most of our neighbors were probably middle-class blue-collar workers. Our house was about a block and a half west of what was known in my early childhood as Jackson Highway, the main road to Nashville. Heading north out of town, this went northeast from North Court Street to Royal Avenue, jogged east for about a block, and, as it passed our neighborhood, climbed a moderately steep two-block-long hill. One of my early memories is lying in bed awake at night listening to the big trucks gearing down as they climbed the hill. Another night sound was the sound of the sirens of ambulances as they headed out to respond to traffic accidents, which were an altogether too frequent occurrence on the curving and hilly two-lane road.

When I was in the first or second grade, the state built a new four-lane highway known as Florence Boulevard, and the Nashville traffic was rerouted to it. Eventually, US 43 was moved to a new road that headed north from Florence Boulevard at the little town of Killen, just east of Shoals Creek, to a point near the Tennessee state line, and the old highway became a county road. It was renamed Hermitage Drive in the city and is referred to as the Old Jackson Highway beyond the city limits. I remember my brother taking me over to see the construction of a big cut on the new road. I found this very exciting: I liked watching the earthmoving equipment, and because my father was a civil engineer involved in road construction and my brother was a civil engineering major at the University of Alabama, I knew all the correct terminology for the machines (they aren't "road graders" they're "motor patrols") and even the brand names and model numbers. It was even more exciting when, at about the same time, the city widened and repaved our street – I got to watch that up close.

The highway was east of us. About a block and a half north was the railroad track. This was the Louisville and Nashville Railroad's branch line from Columbia, Tennessee to Florence. The highway crossed the railroad on an overpass. Between Belle Meade Avenue and the highway was a short segment of an even older version of the highway that had originally crossed the railroad at grade but now ended at an unpaved private road that ran along the tracks. About a mile past the highway overpass, heading south, the railroad ran through what in my early childhood was a shantytown area known as Railroad Hollow and then entered the yards in East Florence. Another night sound was that of the switch engines shunting cars around the yards.

Heading north, the railroad passed a residential area on the west and a large patch of woods on the east. Past the woods, there were fields on both sides and then the Stylon ceramic tile plant on the east and a pasture with a pond on the west. I seem to remember also that when I was first acquainted with this area there was an old house site with a well just before you got to the pasture. Continuing on, the tracks passed a junkyard and eventually went through Dr. Alexander's pasture and crossed Cox Creek.

The railroad track and the woods on the other side of it played major roles in my childhood. By the summer I was eight, I was going to the woods with other boys from the neighborhood. I remember us building forts out of branches and saplings in secret thickets away from the paths. And I remember how the open woods of winter were transformed by the new leaves that came on in late April into a close and mysterious realm. Some years later, when I was in junior high, my friend Royce and I had a bird watching contest – to see who could find and identify the most kinds of birds – the highlight of which was the pair of pileated woodpeckers that took up residence in the woods that winter. Of course, since it was a competition, we both probably cheated a little (well, I'm pretty sure I did, and it wouldn't have been like him not to).

Beyond the woods was an old field overgrown with weeds, and in the midst of the field was an unpainted old shack of a house that neighborhood juvenile lore held to be occupied by a bootlegger. I know of no evidence that he really was a bootlegger, but it was excuse enough for us to harass the poor man, who would curse at us and on one occasion fired a shotgun over our heads. It was in our exploration of the woods and investigation of the “bootlegger” that I learned to disregard “no trespassing” signs.

My friends and I also liked to walk on the railroad track, balancing on the rail or striding from crosstie to crosstie. One of the fields was planted in wheat, and I remember that one spring it was visited by a migrating flock of bobolinks. Not long afterwards, however, some real estate developer turned it into houses. In the pasture there were horses and in the pond there were frogs. Once, in my early adolescence, we hauled the old back porch floor (this was after it had served as the floor of the little “house” that had been attached to the shed) up to the pond and tried to use it as a raft, but it didn’t displace enough water and sank with us. And in Dr. Alexander’s pasture there was a spring shaded by a grove of trees that we sometimes visited. But I think most of all we frequented the woods and the railroad track for the sense of freedom of being out-of-doors, the adventure of exploring new places – and when they were no longer new, the comfort of visiting familiar ones – and the mystery of the leafy shade of the woods.

I have always liked to explore, I have always liked being in the woods, and I have always enjoyed walking. Maybe my strong sense of the physical aspects of places is a result of walking a lot. That seems to be the best way to really absorb the atmosphere of a place.

I probably got a lot of my love of the woods and my habit of walking from my dad. As I have already mentioned, the construction of the Natchez Trace Parkway was his life’s work. In most places, the parkway consists of a road flanked by a strip of woods on either side. It also includes turnouts and parking areas for historical markers, picnic areas, and nature trails. In the course of working on it, my dad spent a lot of time walking through woods. He was always something of a gatherer of wild foods, so he wound up knowing where every nut tree, muscadine vine, and fruit tree on the Trace was. He would bring home black walnuts, white walnuts (a.k.a. butternuts), hazelnuts, hickory nuts, muscadines, persimmons, plums, crab apples – you name it. He could crack black walnuts so as to get the meat out in perfect quarters. I was always in awe of this skill. I can crack black walnuts and get the meat out in little-bitty pieces mixed with fragments of shell. I grew up eating oatmeal cookies made with black or white walnuts, muscadine marmalade, home-made pickled crab apples, home-made plum jam, and fish coated with ground up black walnuts, in imitation of trout almandine, which he had encountered in a restaurant in Ridgeland, Mississippi. Once we had some hickory-persimmon bread – in imitation of date-nut bread – and then of course there was his annual Christmas fruitcake that consisted of a wide variety of dried fruits and nuts, both gathered and bought, with just enough cake to barely stick it together.

My father also liked to fish, and for a number of years, I thought I did, too. He was a good fisherman, but I wasn’t – I was too impatient. He could stand in one spot for hours on end casting his lure with nothing happening, and eventually he’d catch something. I could do it for maybe fifteen or twenty minutes, and then I was off exploring and messing around. Finally, when I was about sixteen, I decided I had better things to do on Saturday mornings than go fishing – like sleeping in.

My initial enthusiasm for fishing came about like this: one Saturday morning in August of the year I was nine years old, I happened to catch a really big grasshopper. I don’t know whether it was my own idea or somebody else had told me that grasshoppers were good fish bait, but I decided that I wanted to go fishing with it. That afternoon my dad was going fishing and my older sister Nancy was going along to paddle the boat, so I went along, too. This was to be a fly-fishing expedition. My dad had a genuine bamboo fly rod that I think he may have won in some kind of contest, and he used it to fish for bass and what we called bream (pronounced “brim”) – actually sunfish such as bluegills, strawberries, and what he called “stump-knockers.” This being the South, there weren’t any trout, of course. To fly fish for bass and bream, you used not a dry fly nor yet a wet fly – those are trout lures – but what we called a “popping bug” – a piece of painted cork with a hook in it, feathers to hide the hook, and rubber-band legs. It was supposed to simulate an insect thrashing around on the surface of the water when you jerked on the line. We'd paddle the boat at maybe twenty feet or so from the bank and cast back in toward the shore.

Well, this particular day we went to a place called Syd's Camp that was on what we called Syd's Slough. Syd's Slough was an inlet of Lake Wilson located about halfway between the dam and Shoals Creek. We rented a boat from Old Man Syd and began fishing in the slough and then out in the big river (i.e. the main part of the lake). Nancy was paddling, Dad was casting his popping bugs, and I was dragging my grasshopper along with a cane pole. I suppose Dad must have caught a few bluegills, although I don't really remember. This went on for two or three hours – at nine years old, it seemed to me a very long time. I was still dragging my grasshopper, now thoroughly dead, but no fish had offered to bite it and I'd pretty well lost interest. We were fishing our way back to Syd's Camp and had reached the mouth of Syd's Slough. As we rounded the point, I happened to drag my limp, dead grasshopper over a submerged stump – and all of a sudden something just about jerked the pole out of my hands. It was a big smallmouth bass – my dad estimated it at four pounds – and it fought like a fury. I held on for dear life and finally wore it down to the point that Dad could get it in the landing net. But the cane pole was ruined – it had a permanent bend in it. After that, I wanted to go fishing at every opportunity.

So it was beginner's luck. I certainly never caught anything that spectacular again. But for the next few years, I was an enthusiastic fly fisherman. By the next summer, Dad had bought me a fly rod of my own and I had learned how to use it. I was never as good as he was – he could even paddle a boat with one hand and fish with the other, but I could usually get my popping bug more or less where I wanted to put it. Of course, snagging overhanging tree limbs was a constant hazard.

My favorite place to fly fish was the area around Syd's Camp. In addition to Syd's Slough, there was another big slough that we called Three-finger Slough because it had three branches. This was prime fly-fishing water. Along the big river there were low limestone cliffs – well, actually, they were probably the tops of rather high cliffs that had been drowned by the lake – the water in midstream just upstream from Wilson Dam was about a hundred feet deep. Above the cliffs was a fringe of trees, and on their cooler and damper side (the one toward the lake) moss and ferns grew on the bark. The sloughs, of course, were really the drowned valleys of little tributaries to the river. Their sides were less steep but they, too, were surrounded by a fringe of trees and in places there were beds of water weeds growing in the shallow water. There were red-winged blackbirds in the trees and little blue herons and great egrets in the shallows. There were dragon flies and water striders, and at unpredictable intervals, great swarms of willow flies. We always hoped to hit upon a willow fly hatch: they are ephemeral in their adult stage – like may flies – and when they hatched out in their thousands and tens of thousands all their predators, including the red-wings and the fish, would go into a feeding frenzy. And in these feeding frenzies, the fish weren't too particular about what they bit.

As I said, my favorite fly-fishing place was the big river and the sloughs off it between Shoals Creek and the dam. The other place we did a lot of fly fishing was Shoals Creek itself. Most of the time we would put in around the bridge where Highway 72 crossed the creek about a mile or so above its mouth and go either upstream or downstream. A few times we started at the Old Jackson Highway Bridge (the old road to Nashville) and fished the upper part of the creek almost to the end of slack water at Goose Shoals. We never caught much of anything up there, though, so we mostly fished the lower part of the creek.

Shoals Creek was very different from the big river in those days because the shore was much more developed. In addition to the places that rented boats, there was a full-scale marina with gas pumps and, if I remember correctly, cabins and a restaurant at Emerald Beach on the east side near the Highway 72 Bridge, and there were lots of houses. Consequently, there were fewer wooded areas, more boat docks, and people's front yards running to the water. This meant fewer overhanging tree limbs and more weed beds. You could catch fish either place, but Shoals Creek just seemed a tamer place than the big river.

Either place, we usually went out early in the morning (the great bass-catching episode notwithstanding). This was because there wasn't much breeze in the early morning and the speedboats weren't out yet. Later in the day it could get pretty choppy from the wind and the boat wakes. Also, it was hotter in the afternoon and thunderstorms were more likely then. I remember the calm and coolness and silence of being on the water before sunup and then watching the colors change from gray-green to brighter greens, blues, and yellows as the sun got up and shone on the leaves and the water. Sometimes we'd be home by eight-thirty or nine o'clock. Once or twice, we even had fresh-caught fried fish for breakfast.

By early afternoon the whole lake – especially Shoals Creek – was astir with people water skiing or just riding up and down in their boats. Some of my elementary school classmates who lived on the lake could water ski just about before they could walk, but I never learned. I tried once, much later, but I never got to where I could stay up for more than a few seconds.

Although most of our fly fishing took place in the areas I've just described, we did try a few others. We went to lower Cypress Creek once or twice, and I went by myself fishing on foot above the slack water at least once. Also, at one point in my adolescence, Dad bought us rubber waders of the sort trout fishermen use, and we fished some places in the Riverbend area and along the Waterloo Road where it ran right along the shore. We didn't go to those places very much, however, because we didn't catch much of anything in any of them.

Fly fishing was a summer activity. The rest of the year (and even sometimes in summer) we would fish from the bank with old-fashioned rods and reels or, later, spinning rods, and artificial bait, usually lead lures that were similar in design to popping bugs but were intended to sink and imitate the motion of minnows. We used this gear to fish for striped bass (or stripes for short), crappie, and what was known locally as jack salmon. Jack salmon were winter fish – they were similar to walleyes but had different markings. I think they were more properly called saugers. My dad considered them to be the best eating of the lot, so they were the usual quarry where winter fishing was concerned. It was also possible to catch a smallmouth or largemouth bass with this kind of fishing, but it happened very rarely.

We did almost all our bank fishing on the south side of the river, in the swift water just below Wilson Dam. When the dam was being constructed, a railroad had been built to carry material and equipment to the construction site, particularly the powerhouse. This railroad began on the top of the cliffs and went down the valley of a little stream to the bottom of the cliffs. It then crossed the little creek on a trestle and proceeded by means of a switchback up a rock fill towards the dam. I suppose the rocks used for the fill, which were quite large, were probably spoil from the excavation for the foundation of the dam. This area has since been made accessible by road and is called the Rockpile, but in my childhood, you had to walk a little way to get to it. There were two ways to get there, both of which started at informal parking areas on top of the cliffs. From one of these, a path led down to the railroad track at the point of the switchback; this area was known, logically enough, as "the Switchback." From the other, a short path led to a place up near the dam where you could climb down the cliff with the aid of a steel cable someone had placed there. This area was known as "Down the Cable."

When we fished this area, we usually went down the cable and stayed close to the dam. As you approached the dam, the railroad track passed through a gate. At this point, the fill it was on narrowed because it went behind one of the wing walls of the dam, which was serving as a retaining wall. The rock fill downstream from this point extended farther out into the river, so that there was a place where the shore actually faced the dam. The powerhouse was on the south side of the dam, so the currents were affected by which turbines were in operation. In particular, if the turbines next to the shore were off and those farther out were on, this would create an eddy such that the current near the shore was heading back toward the dam. When this happened, you could cast toward the dam and reel the lure back against the current. This made for good fishing, especially for crappie, but it happened rarely and, as far as we were concerned, unpredictably. Most of the time, we would stand on the side next to the river, cast out, let the lure drift down with the current, and then reel it in. The reason you wanted to reel in against the current, of course, was that this kept the lure from sinking to the bottom and getting stuck on a rock.

Besides hanging up on rocks, in the rod-and-reel days, there was the hazard of getting a backlash. When you cast, you had to keep your thumb on the reel as the line played out, otherwise the reel would rotate too fast and the line would tangle. I spent a lot of time untangling backlashes. And, as I've said, if the fish weren't biting after fifteen or twenty minutes, I tended to get bored and wander off. This meant that I spent a lot of time exploring the area. I would walk down to the switchback and beyond, down a path that went along the bank as far as the mouth of Pond Creek. In those days, TVA had a fertilizer development plant nearby, and Pond Creek ran beside an area where phosphate fertilizer was piled out in the open to cure (at least I think that's what they were doing). In any case, Pond Creek was heavily polluted by phosphate: it had a very distinct odor, and a vapor would rise off the water. Needless to say, there were a lot of algae around the mouth of the creek.

My most interesting discovery came one day when I noticed what looked like a series of stone steps leading up the hill at the end of the cliff just east of the switchback. I began looking around and soon found other evidence of a well-developed path that had been constructed sometime in the past but had long been abandoned. It ran upstream to the vicinity of the dam, and downstream to, at least, the mouth of Pond Creek. I surmised that it had been built during the Depression, probably by the Civilian Conservation Corps, and subsequently neglected. What its original purpose was, I don't know. It has since been restored by TVA and forms part of a nature trail that extends throughout the TVA Reservation from the dam to the old railroad bridge across from downtown Florence, with another branch along the abandoned rail line from the river into Sheffield.

In addition to the fly fishing and the bank fishing downstream from the dam, we occasionally went fishing with live bait, either from boats of from piers. We fished for crappie a few times at Coffee Slough, where there was a boat rental place, and I remember one night-fishing expedition down at Waterloo where we fished off of a pier. I don't recall if we caught anything, but I do remember drinking coffee to try to stay awake.

My fascination with the river extended beyond fishing. It probably started in my elementary school days. When my brother left for college, I inherited his bedroom. In that room there were bookshelves, that not only contained a collection of *National Geographic Magazines* dating back to 1948, but also a copy of *Tom Sawyer* that I read as soon as I was able to read well enough. It fired my imagination: I was fascinated by ideas such as floating down rivers on rafts and camping out on islands, and the local river served to encourage such fantasies, although it did not fulfill them. We even had an island called Jackson's Island, the same as the one Tom and Huck and Joe Harper were camping out on when they were presumed drowned, but ours was in the swift water just below the dam and was pretty well inaccessible. Also, you wouldn't get very far trying to float down the Tennessee on a raft because of the dams – but *Tom Sawyer* may have had something to do with my trying to float my porch-floor raft on that pond.

A final connection with the river came in my college years when I heard that there was evidence of prehistoric Indian occupation in a river bottom area downstream from the mouth of Cypress Creek. There is an Indian mound down by the river near downtown Florence, so the area was presumably inhabited at one time by one of the mound-building cultures. The city had built a sewage treatment plant just downstream from Cypress Creek. There was a road that provided access for the sewage treatment plant and then continued on through bottom-land pasture between the river and Coffee Slough. If you looked along the bank of the river, you could find "shell mounds" – kitchen middens that were distinguished by black soil and the presence of lots of mussel shells. I walked down there several times – it gave me a sense of the extent of time and the continuity of human presence.

Of course, I couldn't spend all my time in the woods, on the river, or messing around in our back yard. Once I was old enough, there was school. In those days, there was no such thing as public kindergarten in Florence, so I started out in the first grade. My elementary school days were spent at Kilby Training School, the campus lab school at Florence State Teachers College. This was what was known as a "progressive" school – as a campus lab school, they not only trained student teachers but also taught according to the latest educational theory. Fortunately for me, the 1950s were a really benign period in the history of educational theory – we had no homework, no tests, and no letter grades. Instruction covered the basics but was organized into "units," in which we focused on some particular topic, such as local history or some foreign culture. In the fifth grade, there was a beehive attached to the classroom, so we got to study the social life of bees and – if I remember correctly – sample the honey at the end of the year. In the sixth grade, we had a class government – we wrote a constitution, elected legislators and officials, passed laws, held trials when they were violated, and meted out punishments. From this, I learned something profound about self-government: our laws were stricter, and our enforcement of them was more zealous, than anything the teacher could have come up with herself. Along the way we learned skills, like how to prepare an outline, that kids in the city schools had never heard of. Only once in my recollection did the system fail: in the third grade, we spent the entire year studying Mexico, to the neglect of basic skills such as cursive writing, which was supposed to have been introduced that year and had to be made up the next.

I was driven to and from school in the first grade. After that I walked home; I don't remember whether I was driven there the entire six years or began to walk to school some time while I was still at Kilby. In those days, Kilby was located in the middle of the college campus, about a half mile from our house. To get there you took Belle Meade Avenue down our hill and across another hill south of Simpson Street, then jogged a bit east on Royal Avenue, then up the hill on Hermitage Drive to Nellie Avenue, which took you to the corner of the campus. On the way, you would pass Coffee High School, about halfway up the hill on Hermitage Drive, and Florence Junior High School, at the corner of Hermitage and Nellie. So as I progressed through school, the walk got shorter and shorter.

The first year or two, being driven to school could be an adventure, depending on the weather. We had an old 1941 Ford that had neither a heater nor turn signals. To signal, you had to roll down the window a stick your arm out: straight out for left turn, up for right turn, and down for stop. On frosty mornings, or when it was raining, this operation could be a bit chilly or damp. When I was in the second grade, my dad bought a new car. I well remember one rainy afternoon – I think it was in November, but in any case, it was cold weather – when he picked me up from school and we drove up on the Natchez Trace in the new car. It was the most luxurious feeling to be in a warm car on a cold, rainy day. I think he was smoking a cigar, but I didn't mind, it was so nice to be warm.

Eventually, I completed the sixth grade and was expelled from paradise to make my way in junior high school. I was more than a little anxious: this was a new and harsher world with tests and homework and letter grades. We Kilby kids had enjoyed ourselves for six years, but now was the day of reckoning: could we survive? Were the city-school kids better prepared? And also, weren't we turning into adolescents who would be so much more mature than elementary-school kids? Puberty was upon us! Well, I shouldn't have worried. We Kilby kids were more than prepared. Overall, our relative academic performance was at its peak in seventh grade and declined somewhat thereafter as the Kilby influence faded. As for maturity, well, there isn't that much difference between sixth graders and seventh graders. Occasionally my classmates were young adults, but more often they were as childish as ever.

Nevertheless, junior high was a terrible place. The building was dark and noisy with the banging of locker doors, and there were metal grills that could be used to close off the hallways. I thought of it as a prison. And puberty was indeed upon us, with all its petty embarrassments, especially in the locker room at PE. There were lots of fights. And then there was the PE coach. He was a sadist. Paddling was a routine form of discipline back then, and he liked to keep his arm in shape. Otherwise, about all I remember about it is that I discovered that I was nearsighted in my left eye while looking out the window in eighth grade arithmetic class. I was looking at the backs of old Victorian houses on Wood Avenue, and when I closed my right eye, they got blurry.

The best thing about junior high school was that it only lasted two years. In the ninth grade, I started to go to Coffee High School. This was something I had been looking forward to as long as I could remember. All my siblings had graduated from Coffee, and I couldn't imagine graduating from any other high school. Every once in a while, my dad would talk about maybe transferring somewhere else – I remember Carson City, Nevada being talked about at one point – and this always distressed me because I wouldn't get to go to Coffee High School. But as it turned out, we stayed put and I did get to go there. On the whole, I enjoyed high school. It was certainly better than junior high. The building was relatively new and much more attractive than Florence Junior High; also, there was no more reign of terror in PE. I did well academically in high school; at the very end, I was one of three boys picked to represent Coffee in a televised academic quiz show (modeled on the old College Bowl show) that was broadcast from Auburn University. We went four weeks straight and made it to the state semi-finals before fatigue caught up with me and I couldn't remember Millard Fillmore's name and we lost. It was my only taste of celebrity.

Epilogue

When I was eighteen, I went off to college, but I wasn't quite through with Florence. I spent summers there until after I graduated from Vanderbilt, and I visited nearly every year for more than twenty-five years thereafter. About the middle of my junior year in college, my parents bought a new house and moved to a new subdivision north of Highway 72 out toward Shoals Creek. It was a ranch-style house made of yellow brick, with a carport rather than a garage. Some of the floors were hardwood and others (particularly that in the open family room-kitchen area) were of vinyl. By this time, I had been exposed to some snobbish ideas about architecture and urban form and looked down on suburbia. I referred to the new house, with a reference to a song by Malvina Reynolds, as "a tacky box in a wheat field;" at least, that's how I thought of it – I hope I wasn't rude enough to use such an expression around my Mom or Dad. Actually, the wheat field was rather nice. The street we lived on was the last one in the development, and it bordered on a big field. The first couple of years, the field was planted in wheat; then it was in soybeans; and then one year I came home and found it planted in houses very much like ours. At that point, it lost its charm.

Among the place's attractions was the fact that it was on a much larger lot than the old house in town. In the front yard, there were a couple of silver maple trees that had been planted by the developer. Otherwise, the place was pretty much bare when we got there, except for some sassafras bushes that came up in the space between our chain-link fence and the plowed field. This allowed my father to indulge his passions for gardening and planting walnut trees. Eventually, there were also peach and apple trees and there was a mimosa; whether my dad planted it, or it came with the place, I don't know. I think there may also have been a plum tree, but I'm not sure about that nor about when the various trees were planted. One thing I do remember is that my mother had planted a lot of flowers of the daisy type the first year we were there. I spent most to that summer at ROTC camp, but when I came home in August, the flowers, which were various shades of yellow and orange, were in full bloom. It was glorious, but I don't remember that this particular show was ever repeated.

Another attraction was that I now had new territory to explore. This included the land side of some of the areas on the big river where we had done our fly fishing, Shoals Creek, and various points in between. The areas down toward the river were starting to be developed; the one just at the mouth of Shoals Creek had roads graded but no houses built as yet. It stayed that way for several years – financial difficulties, I suppose. To the east of us was the main access road for the west shore of Shoals Creek north of the highway. I was already familiar with this road because one of my dad's co-workers had a house on the lake and we had visited there many times. To the east of a long stretch of it, somebody had planted pine trees, and at some point I did some exploring in the pine woods. Also, there was a road that branched off at the top of the hill just before the main road went down to the lake. This led to an old Girl Scout Camp (later taken over by the YMCA) and a few houses. At one point this road passed through an abandoned apple orchard with old, untended trees that still bore a few apples. Further on, the main road descended the hill and crossed a creek. On either side of the creek there were intersections with other county roads, one leading back behind where we lived and the other (actually the continuation of the main road) heading for Bailey Springs. One winter day I followed one of the branches of the creek and found that it came out at the bottom of the field behind our house. Another time, I explored another branch of the creek and discovered an old ditch and some civil war rifle pits. And I remember walking down to the big river one snowy winter day when I was home for Christmas vacation and seeing ducks and coots on the water.

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

My next place was Nashville. I'm afraid I never really bonded with Nashville, so my impressions may not be entirely fair. I was there from September through May each year, so I got to experience more of the winters than the summers; I don't think that my overall sense of the place would be much different if I had spent summers there, however. I also realize that my sense of a place is really that of the place at a particular time. I was in Nashville from 1964 to 1968, and that was a time of profound change, both for me personally and for the country as a whole. My time there was marked by the violence and turmoil of those years – the early phase of the Vietnam War, the racial violence of the long, hot summers, and the rise of the counterculture. My recollections of Nashville and of Vanderbilt University are also reflections of the kinds of places they were at that time. I understand they have both come up in the world since – although my information about this is largely derived from the Vanderbilt alumni magazine, and must be taken with more than a few grains of salt.

Soot and Gentry

My abiding image of Nashville is this: it is a winter night. The temperature is just above freezing and the wind is blowing; I am headed across campus with a fine, driving rain in my face. That's pretty miserable. Nashville, a.k.a. Nastyville, a.k.a. Gnashville. The nastiness had to do with my other abiding image: it is a winter night, as before. There isn't as much wind, but it's a little colder; there'll be frost on the ground in the morning. I am walking through Nashville's signature smog: a mixture of mist and coal smoke. It stinks. The smog was largely a result of the widespread use of coal for space heating, and rumor had it that the sulfuric acid concentration had been so high during World War II that it would eat the nylon stockings off of women's legs on the Charlotte Avenue viaduct over the railroad yards. Things had gotten better since then, but not all that much. Vanderbilt was a contributor to the pollution; there was a steam plant that burned coal and sent out black smoke from a big smoke stack.

Of course, in the spring and fall, things were different. At the beginning and end of the school year, the weather tended to be hot and humid, and there were even some pleasant days in between. In the winter it would snow occasionally – not much more often than in Florence (it was only about 120 miles farther north) but possibly heavier. Otherwise, it rained a lot, but again, that wasn't much different from Florence. I guess my negative impressions of the weather are more vivid for Nashville than for Florence because I was out in it more, especially at night.

My physical impressions of Nashville are also influenced by the fact that it was a much larger city than Florence and that, because I did not have access to a car for the first two years, my experience of it was concentrated in the older neighborhood that surrounded the campus. These were of varied character. There were some outright slums within easy walking distance. These consisted of shacks rather than tenements or decayed mansions; they had always been slums, from the moment they were built. The ones southeast of the campus were mostly inhabited by poor whites; the main black ghetto was in North Nashville and not so close, although I did walk up there one Saturday afternoon. This was the era of the rise of Black Power; North Nashville was the scene of riots twice during my years at Vanderbilt, and I had a sense that it wasn't exactly a safe place for someone like me to be. Otherwise, the neighborhoods around the campus were a mixture of commercial establishments, some of them occupying old brick houses, blue-collar middle-class areas similar to the one I had lived in back in Florence, and some newer middle-class residential areas of brick ranch-style houses occupied mostly by business and professional types. The really wealthy neighborhoods were on the outskirts, beyond walking distance.

Downtown Nashville was within walking distance, but there wasn't much reason to go there. There were two bona fide skyscrapers, one owned by the Third National Bank and the other by the Life and Casualty Insurance Company. There was Ryman Auditorium, an old repurposed church that was still the home of the Grand Ole Opry in those days, there were a couple of department stores, and there were a number of bars and night clubs, some on Broadway near Ryman Auditorium and others in the Printers Alley district down by the Cumberland River, and of course, there were the State Capitol and the associated office buildings. What else was there, I don't remember. I did not frequent bars and night clubs, I went to the Grand Ole Opry once a year with a group of people for the cultural experience, I had no business at the Capitol, and I did most of my shopping elsewhere.

One physical feature of the Nashville area sticks out in my memory: it was surrounded, especially on the south and west, by ranges of knobby hills. I always think of these little rounded hills as characteristic of Middle Tennessee, or at least, of the Nashville Basin. Most of these hills were out of sight from the campus at ground level; however, there was one exception. A little to the west or southwest of the campus was a hill that was the site of a city reservoir and park. At the top of the hill was a street called Love Circle. I suppose it was well named, since evidence at the site suggested that it served as a lovers' lane. I walked over to this hill from time to time; also it was a prominent feature of the view from one of the places I lived while attending Vanderbilt.

For the first eighteen years of my life, I had lived in the same house, but when I got to Vanderbilt, I became something of a nomad. I had issues with the Housing Office, you might say. University regulations required that everyone from out of town live on campus for the first two years and forbade possession of automobile by freshmen and sophomores unless they came from Nashville and lived at home. My first year, there was some kind of paperwork problem, and I did not get a dorm assignment until very late in the process. As a result I was assigned, along with the rest of the leftovers, to a place called Stadium House. This was an old apartment building located, as the name suggests, near the stadium. It wasn't a very big place; as best I remember, it was two stories high and probably consisted of four units originally, two downstairs and two upstairs. In each of these, the University housed six students, with the old lobbies serving as TV lounges. We were a motley crew – but more about dorm social life later. At the end of the first year, I guess I neglected to apply for a dorm room until after the deadline, so once again I was a leftover. This time they assigned me, along with an Electrical Engineering major who worked as a disc jockey for the campus radio station, to a studio apartment in the married student apartments. This was up on about the fifth floor and was the place that had a commanding view of Love Circle hill. After a semester there, my roommate wanted to room with one of his fraternity buddies, and I was only too happy to move out. I got a single room in Reinke Hall, one of the dorms in Kassam Quadrangle, where several of my friends lived. I stayed there through my junior year, and at that point, if I remember correctly, the University decided to turn Kassam Quadrangle into freshman dorms, so I had to move again. After a bit of um, negotiating (actually I kind of threw a fit) I managed to get a single room on the fourteenth floor of the west tower of the newly-opened Carmichael Towers. I wasn't supposed to be there because Carmichael was supposed to consist of suites and I didn't have any suitemates (and didn't want any). However, the room I had been offered elsewhere was not air conditioned (it was in one of the old freshman dorms that had now been converted to house upperclassmen) – hence the fit.

But wherever I lived, my experience of Nashville was dominated by the kinds of places Nashville and Vanderbilt were. In those days, the foundations of the Nashville economy were money, music, and medicine. It was, of course, the country music capital of the world. It was also a regional financial center featuring banking and insurance, and it was a regional medical center, largely as a result of the presence of the Vanderbilt Medical School and the major hospitals in the vicinity of the campus: Vanderbilt, Baptist, and St. Thomas. To that, you might add manufacturing; there were various factories scattered about town, but they didn't command the public notice that the other three did. And, less alliteratively, it was the regional educational center, the site of a couple of major religious publishing houses, and the state capital.

The combination of country music with finance, medicine, education, publishing, and civil service led to something of a split personality for the city. On the one hand, there was the genteel world of old money and polite professionalism; on the other, the backcountry milieu of moonshine, cornpone, and buttermilk. Vanderbilt, of course, was an integral part of the local genteel world, and as a result, my concept of Nashville as a social and cultural entity was shaped by its values and aspirations.

Genteel Nashville and Vanderbilt did not so much look to the supposed glories of the Southern aristocracy of the past as to England – both New and Old. The consequence was that a sort of frustrated sense of aspiration permeated the local self-consciousness: a constant striving to overcome a sense of inferiority and live up to an ideal self-image that was tantalizingly close, but always out of reach. Vanderbilt was "the Harvard of the South;" but as one wit put it, "you never heard anybody call Harvard the Vanderbilt of the North." Vanderbilt looked primarily to the Ivy League – not just to Harvard, but also, in my day, to Yale – as a source of academic values. But the administration looked even farther: the reason freshmen and sophomores had to live on campus and couldn't have cars was that the administration was promoting an ideal of a residential campus that would ultimately have been organized into residential colleges like those of Oxford and Cambridge – an ideal the Vanderbilt administration appears to be pursuing still.

About Nashville's moneyed elite I am less certain, since I did not travel in those circles. My impression of them is a part of my sense of Nashville, but it may be purely a product of my own imagination, composed of scraps and hints I encountered along the way. My image of that side of Nashville is one of solid sophistication, polite reserve, and understated elegance, not eccentricity and extravagance. Old money, in other words. Money shared with music the connection with the local countryside, but it was as squires, not as yokels. And I have heard that countryside described as being like that of England – pleasant and modest, not spectacular, in its beauty – although I cannot vouch for the accuracy of that observation. So far as I know, few of local squires actually owned estates or manor houses, and if they went in for fox hunting, I never heard about it – but the big local horse racing event was a steeplechase. And, no matter how hard they tried, the local aristocracy could never be quite as civilized and traditional as the British.

Possibly because of the Ivy League model, Vanderbilt in my day focused on the liberal arts and the genteel professions of medicine, law, and divinity. I was a civil engineering major, and the Engineering School was something of a stepchild. Although nobody but divinity students actually studied Greek anymore, the atmosphere and aristocratic values of the old classical education hung about the place. There was the ancient Greek disdain for anything practical: knowledge should be pursued for its own sake, art for art's sake. The great academic glory of Vanderbilt was in literature, particularly the Fugitive Movement of the 1920s, featuring such authors as Robert Penn Warren, Alan Tate, and John Crowe Ransom. By the time I got there, the Fugitives had long since fled, but their aura lingered in Old Central, the seat of the English Department. I'll have to give them credit for one thing, though: they did take the liberal arts seriously; they were rigorous; they expected you to learn to write, if you didn't already know how. And they looked down on us grubby engineers: indeed, civil engineering was considered to be something of a jock major.

Vanderbilt Life

When I arrived at Vanderbilt, I was suffering from delusions similar to those I had carried into the seventh grade: to wit, that I might not be competitive academically, culturally, or socially with my fellow students. Vanderbilt liked to brag about things like how many high school valedictorians it had admitted, and I wasn't one. I had an exaggerated notion of its academic rigor and prestige. Also, I wasn't from a big city – although Florence wasn't a small town, either – and I doubted that I was culturally sophisticated enough to command respect among those I supposed to be the elite of Atlanta, Dallas, and St. Louis – or even Nashville, for that matter. And I doubted that I was cool enough to pass socially: I had enough trouble back in Florence getting girls to date me, so how was I going to fare amongst the rich high-society types at Vanderbilt? And finally, I doubted that I would be as mature as those I would be associating with. After all, now that we were in college, weren't we supposed to be adults, and act like it?

I needn't have worried. It turned out that while I was never a threat to be valedictorian at Vanderbilt, either, I was well above average both in native intelligence and academic preparation. As for cultural sophistication, one look at my roommate at Stadium House disabused me of that idea. He was nominally from St. Louis, but his family had only recently moved there and he was really from some hick town in rural Missouri. He was the epitome of a country boy, and nobody's notion of cool. He spoke with a twang, used corny expressions, and wore shirts with unbuttoned button-down collars. Ivy League, he wasn't. So I could shine by comparison. As for maturity, I should have known that people don't mature overnight between their senior year in high school and their freshman year in college any more than they do between sixth and seventh grade. I was surrounded by a bunch of children who didn't know what to do with the freedom of living away from home for the first time. They were reckless, vulgar, and often clueless. That didn't apply to everybody, of course, but there were enough airheads around that I didn't have to work at looking mature. And socially, although I was never a threat to be a Big Man on Campus, I wasn't a total nerd, either. (Note, in those days *nerd* had a much more derogatory connotation than it does now – we're talking about the era of room-sized mainframe computers, and while there were people absorbed in technology, they weren't culture heroes back then.)

One indicator of mainstream social attitudes at Vanderbilt when I first arrived there was that during freshmen orientation week, the Dean of Men (this was back in the sexist days when such officials were ubiquitous at institutions of higher education) gave a seminar on how to drink like a gentleman. About all I remember about it (other than it happened) was that it was not good manners to have the bottle on the table unless it was wine. The university administration assumed that we would drink, and because the legal drinking age in Tennessee then was eighteen, almost all of us could do so legally. And a lot of my dorm mates at Stadium House did. Unfortunately, they drank more like peasants than gentlemen: the smell of alcoholic vomit was a common morning odor, especially on Sundays. And at least a couple of them were gone after the first semester, the victims of drunkenness and the associated partying.

Close on the heels of orientation week came rush week. Vanderbilt was a big fraternity school, and mainstream social life there was dominated by the fraternities and sororities. Fraternity membership was a badge of identity, and the folklore of the place was full of fraternal stereotypes: Dekes were drunks, Sigma Chis were jocks, Kappa Alphas were unreconstructed Southern aristocrats (one of their big parties was an Old South Ball), and Zebes were Jewish intellectuals (they led all the Greeks in GPA). I knew one guy with a Jewish father and an Episcopalian mother who decided to identify as a Jew because he thought the Zebes were cooler than his other fraternity options.

A few years previously, the administration had tried to reign in the fraternities. They had succeeded in moving all but one of them out of their big old residential houses and into smaller places that housed only the officers and otherwise served as eating and partying places. Of course, fraternities then as now liked to emphasize their positive aspects: the brotherhood, the training in leadership, and the charitable activities that they undertook to atone for their various sins. But for the most part, they served to provide opportunities for their members to be bad influences on one another, provoking each other to drunkenness and snobbery, and as enterprises for producing endless – and sometimes quite elaborate – parties.

Fraternity life was outside the sphere of my inclinations, and consequently I was cut off from the center of Vanderbilt social life. I had quite a bit of company, however. Nearly half of us were Independents, as we were called, and a few Independents managed to rise to the top of the student pecking order. In my senior year, one of them even got himself elected student body president. My lack of interest in fraternities was largely a product of my religious upbringing. I come from a religious background that forbade drinking and dancing, and although I wasn't altogether convinced of the validity of these prohibitions, they were an ingrained part of me when I got to Vanderbilt – I didn't know how to drink or dance and they didn't much interest me. And if you took away the drinking and the dancing, what was left of the fraternity experience? The brotherhood and the leadership opportunities? Who needed that?

The religious connection provided one of the major sources of my social life. I was barely established in Stadium House when I received a visit from Leslie Johnson, a fellow Campbellite (as he would have put it) who had graduated from Coffee High the year before me. I hardly knew him at the time, but he more or less dragged me over to what was known as the Christian Student Center. This was sponsored by the University Church of Christ, which was located on 21st Avenue across from the campus. The Student Center occupied a big old brick house a few doors down from the church, but (fortunately as it later turned out) operated pretty much independently. I fear it had been established for more or less defensive purposes: it was no evangelistic outpost bent on converting the heathen, but rather a "home away from home" (as the brochure put it) for students with Church of Christ backgrounds. I seem to remember that it held Bible classes and devotionals, and I know it sponsored occasional parties, various outings (such as the annual pilgrimage to the Grand Ole Opry), and a couple of retreats per year at state parks that were held in conjunction with a similar group from Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro. But mostly, it was a place to hang out and meet girls.

In those days, the Vanderbilt student body was predominantly male (about two-thirds, I believe) but just across 21st Avenue was George Peabody College for Teachers – in those days a separate institution – and its student body was predominantly female. Since the Christian Student Center served both institutions, it was an excellent place to meet Peabody girls (or "Peabods," as we called them). There were distinct advantages to knowing Peabods. Vanderbilt girls (referred to as TVCs for "typical Vanderbilt coed") had a reputation for being difficult; Peabods were considered to be more tractable. Inasmuch as Vanderbilt was the more prestigious institution – or at least the better known – they were grateful that we should notice them, or so the theory went. And occasionally there were nursing students from Baptist or St. Thomas Hospitals, who were even lower on the social and academic totem pole and hence even more grateful to be noticed. On the whole, it was a pretty good place to hang out, and I met several very impressive people there. But it was hardly mainstream Vanderbilt.

A second major source of social contact was the dorms. In those days, they were strictly segregated by sex, so they provided only male companionship. Of the four places I lived during my stay at Vanderbilt, Stadium House was by far the most communal. As I have already mentioned, the rooms were double occupancy, and on each floor there was a common area that had apparently been a lobby back when it was an apartment house. And as a further result of its apartment house background, some of the rooms could be accessed only by passing through another room. None of this was conducive to much privacy, so there was lots of social life, not all of it wanted. The TV was on pretty much all of the time in the common area, and it tended to be the site of non-stop card games as well. How anybody studied, I don't remember. But I do remember that I still believed in studying at that stage in my undergraduate career.

The semester I spent living in the married student apartments was in total contrast to the chaos of Stadium House. I was pretty much isolated. There was my roommate, with whom I had little in common, there was the view of Love Circle Hill out the picture window, and there were the record albums my roommate brought home from the campus radio station. This began a very strange period in my life. At the beginning of the semester I had gone to a mixer at the Christian Student Center, where I met an incoming Peabody freshman. She was quite good looking, and I moved in on her as best I could. When the party was over, I walked her back to Peabody and sat on a park bench for a long time talking to her. I had visions: a pretty girl and a private place to take her to – there were advantages to not living in a dorm. But as I talked to her, the conversation got stranger and stranger. It turned out that she was going home right away because she had attempted suicide (by swallowing a whole bottle of aspirin) but she would be back for the spring semester. Even though at this period of my life, I had considerable fear of getting involved with mentally ill people (and she obviously was one, although I have never been able to say what the diagnosis was), I was willing to wait for her to come back. I went home that night with a much better appreciation of the phrase "blew my mind" – mine was well blown. I just couldn't get my head around what I had just heard and went about for a day or so in a state of bewilderment. But the upshot was that I promised to write to her, and I did. At first her replies were OK, but the last two – and especially the last one – seemed a little strange.

Meanwhile, there were my roommate's record albums. The radio station got the latest releases and he would bring them home, I guess to preview them in his role as a DJ. This was about the time that Bob Dylan was going electric, and among the things he brought home were Dylan's last acoustic album and his first electric one. The lyrics of some of those songs seemed really weird, as did the overall feel of some of them (*Ballad of a Thin Man*, for instance). I know now that much of the weirdness of the lyrics was related to the presence of drug-culture slang I was unfamiliar with, and in one or two cases to my creative misunderstanding of Dylan's slurred pronunciation. But whatever, this was another case of my feeling dissociated from reality. I began to write poetry. I had already written songs, starting the summer after I graduated from high school, but the first ones had been pretty inauthentic – just imitations of traditional folk song forms. After I got to Vanderbilt, however, I began to write lyrics that were more personal: a reflection of my own inner state, as I experienced it, and from then on, the poems and song lyrics began to reflect what was going on in and around my life.

Overshadowing all this was a decision I didn't want to have to make. I had enrolled in Army ROTC as a freshman. The first two years did not require a commitment to the military, but the last two did. Was I going to make that commitment or not? My alternatives seemed equally unattractive: make the commitment and get sent to Vietnam as a lieutenant or drop out of ROTC and be drafted as soon as I graduated – and get sent to Vietnam. I didn't want to be in the Army (or any other branch of the military, for that matter) and I had absolutely no interest in going to Vietnam. Quite aside from the probable impact on my life expectancy, I had no patience with the military mindset. Military values repelled me: I saw them as being asinine at best and immoral at worst. But I couldn't choose not to choose, so what was I going to do?

On top of that was the fact that I was beginning to have doubts about majoring in Civil Engineering. My academic strengths were well-balanced, at least if my SAT scores were any indication: my math and verbal scores were almost identical. But my personality was more suited to the verbal side of things. I was repelled by dullness and tedium, and engineering education is designed to weed out those who cannot grind their way through a solid mass of dull calculations. I was more attracted to imagination and self-expression and indeed indulged in daydreams of becoming either a famous writer of fiction or a famous composer of popular songs. I had sense enough to know that I would probably starve to death if I had to depend on music or literature for a living, whereas I could make a comfortable living as an engineer, but the real reason that I had enrolled in Civil Engineering was that it was the family profession. Now I was having second thoughts. I wanted to do something socially and culturally significant, and I couldn't see how what I was studying could lead to that. Should I switch majors? But then I would be writing off about half of my first two years in college, and I didn't want to backtrack. I had this thing about wanting to get on with life. So I felt trapped.

The semester finally ended, with a snow storm on Friday night before my Psychology final on Saturday morning. Leslie's brother Bill drove us down to Florence, more or less ignoring the snow (he went 65 MPH, the posted speed limit, snow or no snow) and despite one near-accident, we made it intact. And a week later, I was back in Nashville at the apartment, awaiting the arrival of the girl I had met back in September. No word. Nothing. I called the Peabody dorms. No such person. I kept hoping that she was just late, but after a week or two, I had to accept that she wasn't coming back. And judging from her last letter, maybe that was just as well. But I was utterly disappointed and life was miserable:

Cold rain afallin' in Nashville Town.
Puddles on the pavement, mud on the ground.
Water down my collar, water in my cuffs.
Oh, why can't one trouble ever be enough?

It was at about this time that my roommate said that he would prefer to room with one of his fraternity brothers, and would I mind moving out? I was more than happy to. I had been hanging out quite a bit over at Reinke Hall with Leslie and some of his dorm mates to escape the isolation. I knew one of the rooms there was vacant, so I went. Although this cured my isolation, it didn't do much for my troubled state of mind. Looking back on it, I know I was becoming depressed, but at the time I just knew that I wished I could stop thinking the way I was, but I seemed to have no control over it. Once I got moved into Reinke, I felt like I needed to do something to make an impression on my new environment, so I asked Leslie one day what I could do that would really get their attention. (OK, what I actually asked him was how could I totally gross them out.) Leslie was a notorious practical joker, and the upshot was that we concocted a spectacular practical joke aimed at one of his favorite victims. It involved quite a bit of play acting over several weeks to set it up. We were so successful that more people than the intended victim were being taken in, so we finally had to tell one guy what was actually going on so that when we said it was all a joke we would have a witness. The final trap was to be sprung on April 1, as one last hint to the victims that it was all an illusion. Leslie deserted me to go home to Florence for the weekend, so I had to pull it off all by myself – which I did, with satisfactory results. I guess it enhanced my reputation – for what I'm not sure – but it didn't help my mental state any. It was one more case of dissociation from reality.

It got to the point that I was having trouble concentrating on school. I would sit around in my room, supposedly doing my math homework for the next day, but really not getting started. My mind was going, "I must do my math homework. If I don't do my math homework, I'll fail math. If I fail math, I'll flunk out. If I flunk out, I'll get drafted. If I get drafted, I'll get sent to Vietnam. If I get sent to Vietnam, I'll get killed. I must do my math homework." And eventually, it would get to be two in the morning and I would decide I had better go to sleep, since my grade would get lowered if I cut too many classes, (which was worse than not turning in homework) and I might not wake up in time otherwise.

I finally got through my strange semester. I swallowed my distaste for the military and sold my soul to the Army. It began to dawn on me that technological change was the driving force for most social, economic, and cultural change in this era, so being an engineer was not only relevant, it was the most culturally significant thing you could be. And when I got my grades, they were pretty much as they had always been. From this last I learned a very valuable lesson: I didn't have to study to get good grades. Thereafter I dropped the pretense, refrained from what Leslie referred to as "scabbing" (because of its supposed effect on the grade curve) and did pretty much whatever I wanted to. I would go to class and listen (provided I could stay awake) and I would read the assignments, but I didn't take very many notes on either. In the engineering courses, I would do the least amount of homework I thought I could get by with, and I developed the knack of getting the lowest possible B (or in a few cases, the lowest possible A), anything more reflecting a lack of efficiency. I was very good at understanding the professors' strategies in making up tests, and I learned to attack the premises of essay questions rather than actually answering them.

In my senior year, the Engineering School instituted an honors program, and I was selected to be a part of it. This meant there were no more required courses; I could take whatever I wanted to, but I did have to do an independent research or study project. I chose to do a paper on a freeway controversy that was going on in North Nashville, where I-40 was slated to be built alongside Jefferson Street, destroying much of the principal black business district in Nashville. I ran around collecting information and interviewing people, including highway department engineers and a Fisk University professor who was leading the protests. I had made the mistake of taking some of the required Civil Engineering courses in order that my education in my major might be well rounded, and between their unexpected rigor, my lack of interest in them, my enthusiasm for my research project, and the fact that I was dating steadily for the only time in my Vanderbilt career, I got distracted and made a couple of Cs, which dropped my GPA for the semester below the limit for the honors program. They should have kicked me out, but the professor in charge was so impressed with my research paper that he not only let me stay, but waived the requirement for an individual project for the second semester. So I coasted through my last semester, taking (among other things) a philosophy course and a modern architecture course, both of which I enjoyed immensely, and sitting in the back of the room in my hydrology class and playing chess with a fellow student by writing the moves down on a piece of paper. I don't remember how we kept up with where the pieces were on the "board."

But I digress. Back to dorm life. Reinke Hall consisted of single rooms arranged along a long corridor, with a common bathroom and a telephone (probably a pay phone, but I don't remember) in the middle of the building. There were several floors like this – three, I think, but I don't remember for sure. Unlike Stadium House, there were no TV lounges or other common space that I remember. Rather, social life took place in the corridor or in various people's rooms. My room was on the second floor, down toward the west end of the building (the long axis was east-west). Until he graduated halfway through my junior year, life in this vicinity was dominated by Leslie Johnson. He was a natural leader. He never seemed to be at loss for something to do – he did just what he wanted to, and you could join him if you wanted to. People usually wanted to. What he wanted to do, depending on the circumstances, might be to play tackle football without pads, go watch Batman on TV, play practical jokes on people (I've already mentioned his skill and reputation in that regard – I don't know why anybody ever believed anything he told them), play chess, or make a late night snack run on the Waffle House (located a couple of blocks north of West End Avenue and otherwise known as the Awful Waffle or simply the Awful House). He was not tender of people's feelings: as previously mentioned, he had his favorite practical joke victims – and they loved him. In my case, we would play chess. I was too impatient to be any good at it, and he would always beat me. Then he would "console" me by saying, "It's only a game, Banks!"

My final year was spent in a single room on the fourteenth floor of Carmichael Towers. It had a spectacular view, but it was a sterile environment socially. Most of my human contact took place elsewhere, at the Christian Student Center, among my engineering classmates, and in Alpha Phi Omega, a service fraternity. I said I had nothing to do with fraternities, but actually I was a member of three; two honorary fraternities and that service fraternity. My involvement with APO was one more case of Leslie Johnson's influence. It was one of his projects. He was a prominent member, and eventually they elected him president. I got elected recording secretary on his coattails, so I had one more item to add to my activity credits next to my senior yearbook picture.

Race and Politics

I have said that my years in Nashville were ones of profound change in the society at large. The Berkeley Free Speech Movement took place during my first semester at Vanderbilt. Then came the first major escalation of the Vietnam War, when it went from being the affair of Green Berets and military advisers to being something that would affect us all. Then came the Watts riots, and on their heels the upheavals in Newark, Detroit, and the other big-city ghettoes. Then came pot and LSD and the 1967 Summer of Love. The air was heavy with anger and weirdness, at least if you believed what you heard and read – but all this was pretty remote from daily life on the Vanderbilt campus. We read about it in papers and magazines or heard about it on the evening news; still, it was out there somewhere, not right here. But it was growing ever closer: the Vietnam cloud on our personal horizons swelled and darkened and the old antiwar cause of nuclear disarmament was swallowed up by the far more urgent opposition to the Vietnam War – not that there were any demonstrations that I remember on campus. The Old Left was swept away by the New Left, and the old non-violent Civil Rights Movement was challenged by Black Power. Racial violence came even to Nashville. And our consciousness was altered, whether we experimented with hallucinogenic drugs or not.

The one part of all this that wasn't so remote was the racial conflict. I have already mentioned that there were riots in North Nashville twice during my years at Vanderbilt. Some of Nashville's conservative element even blamed one of these on Vanderbilt. One of the more memorable events during my four years there was the 1967 Impact Symposium. Impact was a weekend event held in the spring at which several prominent individuals (mostly politicians and the like) would speak. The organizers tried to get speakers with opposing points of view, both for balance and to create the opportunity for dialog – or conflict – to add spice to the occasion. The 1967 committee outdid itself in this regard: the featured speakers were Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael, Strom Thurmond, and Allen Ginsberg: that is, the voice of the old Civil Rights Movement, a voice of the emerging Black Power Movement, an old-time segregationist (as Thurmond still was at that point in his career), and this famous proto-hippie beat poet, who was gravitating toward the New Left at the moment. There were several other speakers, but those four were the potentially exciting ones.

I was most interested in Ginsberg, since he was by far the weirdest of the lot. At noon on Saturday the speakers held forth at luncheons in various frat houses. I was at the one attended by Ginsberg. I have a vague recollection that I was there in some sort of official volunteer capacity, and that I consequently got in free; but if so, I have no idea what I was supposed to be doing. Also, if this was the case, I was probably assigned to that particular house, and the fact that it was the one Ginsberg was at was just luck of the draw. In any case I was there to hear him say (in response to a question) that Bob Dylan was America's greatest living poet. Modesty obviously prohibited him from claiming the honor for himself. After lunch Ginsberg read his poem *Wichita Vortex Sutra*, and then Carmichael spoke. I don't remember what he said, except that his title was "The Individual and Black Power." That night, the riot broke out in North Nashville, and it was attributed (at least by some) to Carmichael's presence in town. So Vanderbilt got blamed for having invited him.

The second riot happened about a year later in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King. Of course, I wasn't anywhere near the scene of the disorder in either case, but I do remember seeing the glow from the fire that consumed the ROTC Building at Tennessee State University (located in North Nashville) during the second one. In between, I was more personally involved in one (rather feeble) attempt to improve race relations. Vanderbilt had waited until my freshman year to desegregate, so there were only a handful of black undergraduates. It moved much faster in integrating its athletic program, however, and by my junior year had recruited a high-profile black basketball player named Perry Wallace.

The Vanderbilt sports scene was generally pretty dismal in those days: we students got into athletic events with our student ID cards (in other words, they wouldn't have wanted to give us the option of not paying to attend) and football games were considered to be date nights. Guys would show up in their coats and ties with their dates and their flasks (dating being pretty generally a dress-up affair) and proceed to get drunk and ignore the awfulness on the field. And baseball was completely off the radar – I can't recall ever hearing of anybody going to a baseball game. But basketball was an exception. Vanderbilt won the SEC basketball championship my freshman year and was in contention all four years.

The big star my freshman and sophomore years was Clyde Lee, a Nashville product and a member of the Church of Christ who occasionally showed up at the Christian Student Center. Wallace was to be his successor. He too was from Nashville, and incidentally, he too was a member of the Church of Christ. The summer prior to his freshman year, Wallace enrolled in summer school and one Sunday morning showed up at the University Church of Christ. The Elders asked him to leave as they weren't ready to integrate their congregation – an event which lives on in the lore of Nashville racial infamy, since it made it into a recent biography of Wallace. Since this happened during the summer, most of the Christian Student Center crowd was not immediately aware of it; when we found out, we weren't happy about it, but there wasn't much we could do other than quit going to the University Church, which most of us had already done for other reasons. But we felt bad about it.

By the second semester of my senior year, things had come to the point that some of us at the Christian Student Center decided that we needed to do something about the race issue. It was *the* hot topic of conversation, and many white Southerners of the less benighted variety felt the need to *do* something, without knowing quite what would make sense. What we decided to do was to sponsor a dialog with some black people. It was long enough ago that I'm not sure exactly what role I played, but I have a vague recollection that I may have been the principal instigator of this project, and that I was the one who spoke to Perry Wallace and persuaded him to come. In any case, he did. Of course, there were other African-American participants, but I don't remember how we recruited them.

In the course of the discussion, a black guy I'd never seen before got off onto the subject of the freeway controversy in North Nashville. Since I had recently made a pretty intensive study of it, I undertook to respond to what he had to say. His view was typical of the Nashville black community: that the proposed location of the road was racially motivated and that the interests of the Jefferson Street business community had been deliberately disregarded because it was a black neighborhood. I had interviewed people on both sides of the question and based on both my education and my family background, I thought I had a pretty good idea of how highway engineers think. It was (and still is) my opinion that race per se had little to do with it: the highway department was looking for a direct route and cheap right-of-way, and they didn't really care what color the people in the way were. In other words, they'd have acted pretty much the same if it had been a white business district with similar property values. I said this, and we argued about it for a while. As far as I was concerned, it was a friendly argument, and the fact that I was willing to engage in it was a sign that I viewed him as an equal.

So far as I know, he wasn't offended, but some of the white participants were. As near as I can figure, their idea was that the way to improve race relations was for us to listen respectfully to whatever black people had to say to us and never express any disagreement – I suppose to atone for our ancestral insolence and condescension. To my mind, that *was* condescending. In any case, one earnest-sounding white person came up to me afterwards and told me, “It’s because of people like you that we have events like this.” And I had the satisfaction of telling him, “Yes – I was the one that organized it.”

But I was still a little concerned about Perry – he seemed dissatisfied with the evening. So I invited him up to my dorm room and showed him a project I was doing for my modern architecture class. It was a design for a shopping center utilizing the air rights over the proposed freeway. Of course, nothing ever came of that, although similar structures were built elsewhere, and if they’d played their cards right, the Jefferson Street business community might have extorted the funding out of the highway department. But Perry and I talked for quite some time; I don’t know if he went away more satisfied than when we started, and I doubt that he remembered any of this, but that was my contribution to the quest for racial harmony in 1960s Nashville. Perry went on to a successful academic and legal career, but sadly, he is no longer with us, having passed away last year.

My political and cultural views shifted steadily to the left during the time I was in Nashville. In part this was the effect of being on a university campus, but I don’t think that fully explains it. Vanderbilt seemed to be different from the radicalized campuses we read and heard about: the administration was generally to the left of the faculty, and the faculty was to the left of the majority of the student body. Left to their own devices, many of my classmates would have been content to lead comfortable and respectable lives as members of the Southern urban elite. And many of them are conservatives to this day. I think maybe that my Christianity had as much to do with it as anything, at least as to the political part. In contrast to more recent times, the 1960s were an era of widespread liberal influence among serious Christians of all varieties. There was some concern that social consciousness not crowd out more fundamental beliefs about divinity, sin, and salvation, but everyone agreed that justice, compassion, and generosity were basic Christian values. Politically, this translated into concern about poverty, racial inequality, and violence of all sorts. Where the Vietnam War was concerned, of course, I was influenced by concern for my personal safety and convenience; but as it kept growing, it seemed to make less and less sense. Also, there was the influence of my musical tastes: I was a folkie. And the folk revival was heavily influenced by liberal – or even radical – ideas and causes: the Civil Rights Movement, the Labor Movement, the Anti-war Movement. It united Jewish culture derived from Eastern and Central Europe with the traditional American cultures of poverty – black and white – from the Appalachians and the rural south. And it did it in a way that appealed to my educated-class tastes. As the acoustic folk songs of the early 1960s morphed into the drug-influenced folk-rock of the late 1960s, my thinking and cultural values began to shift as well. I was attracted to the atmosphere of the counterculture as it began to develop: not the drugs and free sex but the esthetic values and the liberation from the tyranny of fact and logic. By the time I left Nashville, I wanted to be on the cutting edge, where the action was, in the midst of the excitement.

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

So I went to Berkeley. When I entered Vanderbilt, I had no intention of going to graduate school; I expected to graduate and get a job – although the military had always been an obstacle to that plan. Once I had signed up for advanced ROTC, the Army had me. Once they had you, however, they recognized the advantages of letting you get more education at your own expense, so they were perfectly willing to issue delays of active duty to people who were going to graduate school. Since the war was not getting over – indeed, it seemed to be getting worse – I thought it prudent to go to graduate school rather than going on active duty immediately after graduation. I knew that I wanted to specialize in transportation engineering, and I had originally planned to apply to three programs: the University of California Berkeley, Yale, and the University of Michigan. UC Berkeley was an obvious choice, since it had what was probably the best program in the field. Yale also had a program with a good reputation, and I had been influenced enough by the Vanderbilt environment to be attracted by the Ivy League. As for Michigan, I don't know why they were on my list – maybe I had been misinformed? I did not consider Northwestern University, which was the other program of comparable stature to Berkeley's, but I'm not sure why.

As it turned out, the only application I actually submitted was the one to Berkeley. Although I had survived my strange semester, I was still not highly motivated to move on to the next phase in my life. The original version of the movie *The Graduate* (the one with Dustin Hoffman) was just out, and I think I saw it twice. It was the popular thing that year for recent graduates to lie around doing nothing, bewildered by the future. Anyway, as has often been the case since, I found it easier to pursue my familiar routine rather than to launch out into the unknown. That may have been just as well. Berkeley accepted me. Yale's program moved to Penn State, and I can't remember hearing much about Michigan's program since.

So I was going to go just where I wanted to – to where the countercultural action was. But meanwhile, I had my last summer at home in Florence to get through. At one point I had planned to get a job in Nashville and stay there, but that plan fell victim to my inertia. If I looked for a job, it was only at the very last minute and in the most half-hearted fashion possible. Besides, what kind of summer job could I get as a graduate engineer? So I wound up back home with nothing in particular to do. I let my hair and moustache grow, wandered around the area on foot day and night, wrote some bitter songs, and I got into a conflict with the minister at the church we were going to that left me feeling isolated and angry. By the time I sold the old car I'd bought two years earlier and gotten on a Greyhound bus for California, I said (to myself, anyway) that I was going to get as far away from Alabama as I could without going to Vietnam.

New in Town

It took three nights and two days and a piece to get to Oakland. It was about ten o'clock in the morning when I got there, and my first impression was that this was the brightest, bluest sky I'd ever seen. That might have been because I was used to the humid haze that envelopes the South, or maybe it was just what three nights and two days on a bus does to your vision. I took a transit bus up to Berkeley, got a room at the YMCA, and headed for the campus. There I beheld a whole hillside covered with hippies – far more at one glance than the half dozen or so that hung about Nashville. They weren't doing much of anything, just sitting there. The next day, I bought a newspaper, read the want ads, and went out hunting for a place to live. I remember looking at one that was only about a block north of the campus that I judged to be inhabited by hippies, but I rejected that one because there was a cloud of some kind of gnats or flies swarming around the entrance. I wasn't ready to go native quite that much. Later that afternoon I looked at a room in a house up on the hill north of campus, on Buena Vista Way. It seemed like a nice place and I could afford it, so I took it.

I shared the house with the owner, a widow named Ruth, and a physics graduate student from Canada. It was a thoroughly civilized place: the bedrooms were upstairs and downstairs there was a living room (or family room?) with bookshelves, a wooden floor, and an oriental carpet. There were no kitchen privileges, but the books downstairs were fair game, and there was a radio in my room. There was a view of the Golden Gate Bridge. Out back was a deck that was overhung by the limb of a eucalyptus tree. One of the first projects the Canadian guy and I undertook (at Ruth's behest) was to saw off the limb that was overhanging the deck, since eucalyptuses are notorious for dropping limbs or even falling over. Ruth also took us along on a weekend trip up to Trinity County to visit her sister, who was even older than she was and lived in a cabin back in the woods where she could get snowed in for weeks at a time in the winter.

An architect named Bernard Maybeck had lived across the street and had his studio there. He was considered world famous in Berkeley, although I had taken a modern architecture course my last semester at Vanderbilt and had never heard of him. He was of the school that in Southern California is referred to as craftsman style – think redwood shingles and industrial sash windows – and that was the basic look of the immediate neighborhood, although there was also a house that looked like a Greek temple a couple of blocks up the street. Some of Maybeck's family still lived directly across the street. Buena Vista Way was the closest thing to an upscale neighborhood that I ever lived in. I was among the cultural elite.

Local Geography

When I left for Berkeley, I had no idea what the place was like physically. I had been in the West only three times and never as far as the Pacific Coast. What I had seen of it had been mostly desert or semi-desert. There had been a few trees here and there but they seemed to be mostly on the tops of mountains. I knew the annual rainfall was around 20 inches; I'd never lived where it was less than about 45 inches, so I was picturing a dry place that looked pretty much like what I had seen elsewhere in the Wwest. So one surprise was how green it was. There were redwoods on campus, and whole forests of eucalyptus trees. I remember that the day I was out looking for a place to stay was in late September. The sun was shining, I could smell the pungent odor of the eucalyptuses, and the scrub-jays were calling. A little later, in the eucalyptus grove at the west entrance to the campus, there was a flock of yellow-billed magpies. They were around for a few weeks, and then I never saw them again. They don't normally live down on the coast, although they are common in the Central Valley around Sacramento.

But best of all was the amount of open space within walking distance. Immediately behind the developed part of the campus was Strawberry Canyon. Until you got to the very top of the hill where the Rad Lab was located, it was undeveloped except for a recreation center and the botanical gardens. There was a fire road that climbed up the rim of the canyon, and there were a number of informal trails made by dirt bikers (mostly of the motorized variety), although I think the management frowned on that and eventually got rid of them. In those days, the upper portions of the canyon rim were covered with a eucalyptus forest. Elsewhere, there were live oaks, California bay trees, firs, chaparral, and (along the creek) a few redwoods. I discovered my own private redwood grove (it was only a few trees) down at the bottom of the canyon near the botanical garden. I would go there occasionally to enjoy the peace and quiet. If you went up to the top of the hill north of campus past Grizzly Peak Boulevard, eventually you would come to Tilden Regional Park, and if you went from there up along the ridge to Wildcat Peak, you could see the San Pedro Reservoir on the other side. Hawks liked to soar on the thermals off the side of the ridge. And if you went far enough north along the ridge, you would get into Wildcat Canyon Regional Park and you could keep going almost all the way to Richmond.

I lived in Berkeley off and on for about six years, and I never owned a car while I was there. Consequently, my geographical experience of the area was limited to places I could get to on foot or by public transit and places my friends with cars were willing to take me. For the most part, these last were places they wanted to visit themselves and invited me to go along. This means that my idea of Berkeley is somewhat less geographically extensive than my idea of Florence, or at least, that the more remote parts of my Berkeley environment were more scattered. That environment included the areas I have already described – the main part of the campus, the undeveloped areas east of it in Strawberry Canyon, the developed hill to the north, and the regional parks over the hill – plus San Francisco, downtown Berkeley (the Shattuck Avenue business district), the South Campus area along Telegraph Avenue and other parts of Berkeley south of the campus as far as Ashby Avenue, parts of Oakland, the Richmond Field Station, parts of southern Marin County, and the Tahoe National Forest, where I spent the summer of 1969 working for a research project. My Berkeley experience also included brief excursions to South

Lake Tahoe, Brentwood (on the back side of the Berkeley Hills), Napa, Santa Rosa, the coast along Highway 1 north of San Francisco, and Monterey. I climbed to the top of Mount Tamalpais once with a group of people, and one winter morning, I took a transit bus down to Redwood Regional Park on the south side of Oakland, where there was frost on the ground and I saw a varied thrush. I always wanted to go to Mount Diablo and Point Reyes but I never got to either because I didn't have a car.

I believe I have already mentioned that I lived in Berkeley during two different periods – between September 1968 and May 1970 and between August 1972 and August 1976 – separated by two years in the Army. During my first stay, I continued the nomadic existence I had begun in Nashville. For the first nine months, I lived in the room on Buena Vista Way. Then I went up to the Sierras and lived with a fellow research assistant in a little house in a place called Peardale, on the road between Grass Valley and Colfax. When I came back to Berkeley in September 1969, I moved into a room in an old house on Benvenue Avenue (about a block from where Patty Hearst was later kidnapped) and stayed there until sometime a little after the first of the year. The last four months or so, I lived with a couple of church friends in an old house in North Oakland that belonged to one of them.

Each of the places I have experienced had its own atmosphere compounded of architecture, topography, vegetation, and weather. In the case of Berkeley itself, the topography was mostly either nearly flat or very steep. The campus was something of an exception, since it was at the base of the hills. It sloped up from Strawberry Creek on both the north and south, and was at its highest at its northeast corner.

The architecture was a mixture of styles. Most of the older buildings on the main campus were of light gray stone (limestone, I think) with red tile roofs. There was one exception: South Hall was a brick extravaganza, evidently built in the late nineteenth century, that would have been more at home on the Vanderbilt campus. The recent buildings were in a variety of "modern" styles, and included some high-rises and some in what I would call "twentieth-century brutal" style – unfinished concrete walls and in at least one case, exposed pipes in the interior. Off-campus, you could find everything from wooden Victorians through modern wood-and-glass creations. There were quite a few houses in a rustic style featuring redwood shingle roofs and (sometimes) siding, lots of stucco, and a lot less brick than in Florence or Nashville – presumably because this was earthquake country. And scattered about, in the most unexpected places, you might find architectural fantasies of the most extravagant sort. I've already mentioned the Greek temple house up on Buena Vista Way, but there were others. During my second stay in Berkeley, I lived across the street from a development called Normandy Village. That's what it was – a fake French village composed of small apartment buildings with weirdly sloping roofs. All it was lacking was thatch. There were other places that are harder to describe but were equally eccentric. And for the most part they worked: the architecture was skillful, if eclectic, and they tended to blend with their surroundings. They were the result of the considerable wealth and cultural sophistication that had characterized Berkeley for generations.

Vegetation was surprisingly lush. I've already mentioned the redwoods and eucalyptus trees as well as the vegetation up in Strawberry Canyon. On the campus and in the various parks scattered about the city there was more of the same plus various exotic trees and shrubs of types I don't clearly remember. On campus, there were a couple of California buckeyes. They were unusual because they lose their leaves in the summer – when I first saw them, I thought they had died, but they were green as ever in the winter. There were flowers everywhere. There was a formal rose garden on terraces in the hills north of campus and I especially remember the fuchsias around many of the houses. And the grass was well watered and very green. The lawns on campus had little white daisies mixed in with the grass in springtime.

The weather in Berkeley itself was a little warmer than in San Francisco or downtown Oakland, but otherwise pretty similar. It was less rainy than I had been used to, but not really dry because of the prevalence of fog and low clouds. The summers were much cooler, and the winters were relatively mild.

There was never any snow that stuck at the elevation of the campus, although some fell occasionally; snow did stick a little higher up, near the tops of the hills. I can remember the first time I saw snow falling up there. It was raining and I was looking out the picture window of somebody's high-rise dorm room. The crest of the ridge was wreathed in clouds and every once in a while they would part and you could see that there was something white on the ground. My very first thought was that there was a fire up there, and what I was seeing was smoke and ashes being deposited on the ground. But that didn't make sense – it was raining! Then it hit me – it was snow.

Then there was San Francisco. It was pretty much all hills. The hills weren't as high as in Berkeley, but they were just as steep, if not steeper. The weather was similar, but cooler and foggier, and the vegetation was pretty much the same. But it was very different. It looked and felt like a big city. There was a certain tension about it, and a lot of it had to do with the urban form and the architecture. One of my favorite urban sights is coming into San Francisco from the south on the Junipero Serra Freeway. You've been driving through classical Northern California rural scenery – rounded hills, oak trees scattered out through the grass, and glimpses of the reservoirs down below – and then there is a point at about the southern city limits where the whole city is spread out before you. Houses that look like little white boxes seem to cover every inch of the hills in the foreground, and in the background, a forest of tall buildings spreads across the horizon. Overhead is blue sky and to the right and ahead are the Bay and the fog bank, white on top and gray underneath. The scene is almost unreal, almost magical. The city is so dense, and yet so harmonious, that it seems incredible that this is just the product of the greed of real estate developers!

Of course, this vision of the city is the product of more recent visits. As I experienced it then, visits to San Francisco began on public transit. During my first stay in Berkeley, the only practical way to get there was by bus. The East Bay Transit express bus from Berkeley came into San Francisco on the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. As the bus approached the end of the route at the Bay Bridge Terminal, it was almost like coming in from the air. The bus was on the bridge, high above the water, and there off to the right was a wall of high-rise buildings in downtown San Francisco. In my experience, it is one of the most spectacular urban views in America, and it was better experienced by bus than if you were driving and concentrating on not getting run into.

Once I was in the city, I did most of my exploring on foot. The older neighborhoods in San Francisco have a peculiar ambience about them. Bay windows are a signature architectural feature. There are a lot of three or four-story buildings with bay windows stacked on top of one another, which makes for an undulating façade when there are several of them in a row. Combined with the hills – and the streets were laid out in a grid pattern with no concern for topography, so they're really steep – and the fog, the overall effect is somehow antique, at least to the eyes of someone accustomed to mid-century modern minimalism. It seemed somehow gothic, not in the sense of fake medieval cathedrals, but rather in the sense of grotesque. It was part of the charm and mystery of the place. Add to this that people were beginning to paint Victorian houses and other antique-looking structures with bright and contrasting colors to set off the elaborate trim. This was something of a revelation to me: back home, in those days, Victorian houses were invariably painted white and looked boring. These were exciting, and the fashion seemed to be related to the whole emerging psychedelic esthetic that went in for bright color and baroque complexity.

Because I was getting around on foot mostly, I was best acquainted with tourist San Francisco: Market Street, the northern waterfront up to Fishermen's Wharf and Ghirardelli Square, Chinatown, Telegraph and Russian Hills, North Beach, Union Square, and other such places. I did get beyond this part of town, however. I remember that on at least one occasion I walked all the way across the peninsula from the Bay Bridge Terminal to the ocean. Almost half of that distance was through Golden Gate Park. I don't remember too much about it, except that there were trees and lots of grass, and some lakes and, of course, that the closer to the beach you got, the foggier it was. I don't remember for sure, but I probably passed by Haight-Ashbury on that trip; certainly I was there other times. Along Fulton Avenue by the park, there were big, old houses, a couple of which were occupied by local rock bands: there was the Dead House, home of the Grateful Dead, and the Airplane House, home of the Jefferson Airplane. Height-Asbury itself wasn't so remarkable for its architecture – it was a just an ordinary little outlying business district – but the people and some of the businesses you saw there were something else. The neighborhoods bordering the park farther west – the Richmond and Sunset Districts – were mostly made up of blocks and blocks of little stucco houses. It was usually foggy out there.

Other places I remember include Pacific Heights, one of the local bastions of extreme wealth, and a little business district along Union Street. Pacific Heights consisted of a few blocks of very well-kept but otherwise unremarkable town houses. It wasn't very exciting. The Union Street business district ran to boutiques, craft shops, and little bistro-type restaurants. I guess you could call what I was seeing there proto-yuppie culture.

Well, they were beautiful and they were exciting, but alas! Berkeley and San Francisco in those days were also dirty, especially in their more interesting parts. Hippies were never known to be fastidious as to either their persons or their surroundings. But it wasn't so much the gum wrappers and the scraps of newspaper and the cigarette butts; the worst of it was the dogs. Dogs were in fashion – big ones. And, hey man, we're into freedom here – how would you like to be leashed? So they weren't. You'd get a sandwich for lunch and go sit down on a bench somewhere on campus to eat it in peace, and the next thing you knew you'd be eyeball to eyeball with a drooling German Shepherd – not exactly begging, more like demanding, his share. And you had to watch where you stepped. You really did. Very carefully. Little baggies and scoops were unheard of in those parts.

Sierra Summer

I have said that the summer I spent in the Sierras was part of my Berkeley experience and thus a part of my sense of that place. You might say that the northern Sierras are like an extension of the Bay Area: it's where the water comes from and it's where people go to get away from the crowd. I was up there because I was working as a research assistant for a project to develop a transportation planning process for national forests that the Institute of Traffic and Transportation Engineering (as it was then called) was doing for the National Forest Service. A couple of us were sent up to the Tahoe National Forest to gather data on travel characteristics on forest roads. This mostly meant that we were recording speeds and travel times on the roads serving the forest, which were mostly used by either visitors (tourists, in other words) or logging trucks. The car we were driving was instrumented: it had a recording speedometer and a cross painted on top so it would show up in aerial photos. We used the recording speedometer, but of course nobody was trying to track us from the air. On weekdays, we were supposed to be chasing logging trucks and on weekends, tourists.

The roads in question were mostly either winding state highways (especially State Route 49, the "Mother Lode" highway) or unpaved logging or campground access roads. Before I went up there, I had envisioned the mountains as damp, cool, and shady. There *was* quite a bit of shade: there were still old-growth forests of pine and fir, although the last of them were being logged then; but despite the fact that there were still some patches of snow around at the highest elevations when we got up there in late June, it was anything but damp. The sun beat down every day. It didn't rain a drop all summer. And that meant that the unpaved roads we were driving on were inches deep in dust. There was always a cloud of dust behind us and there were even bigger ones behind the logging trucks.

The driving itself was quite an experience. My partner was a French graduate student named Louis. Louis supposedly had a European driver's license, but I don't think he had actually driven before. It wouldn't have looked good if I had done all the driving – if I had, why were there two of us up there wasting the taxpayers money? So I let him drive. On those twisting state highways and those washboarded forest roads where you could lose contact with the surface if you went too fast. And I was in fear of sudden death the whole time. He didn't get the concept that you should slow down before you entered a sharp curve, especially if you couldn't see how sharp it was before you got into it. And no matter which one of us was driving, there were the logging trucks. I said we were supposed to be chasing them (to see how fast they went) but sometimes they chased us. There is nothing much more frightening than a fully loaded logging truck bearing down on you from the rear. One of my artifacts from that summer is a picture I drew in colored ink of the front of a logging truck as it appears in a rearview mirror. That picture oozes paranoia.

A lot happened that summer of 1969. It was the summer of Woodstock and the moon landing. It was also the summer of the Manson murders. It was the high-water mark of the counterculture and the beginning of the end of peace and love. And I missed most of it because I was up in the woods chasing (and being chased by) logging trucks. Our major cultural influence was the pop-music radio station we listened to on the car radio as we were driving around. I may have heard only vague rumors of what went on at Woodstock, but I was well aware what the big hits were that summer out in Middle America. There was *Sugar, Sugar* by the Archies – the ultimate teeny-bopper bubblegum song, *Sweet Caroline* by Neil Diamond, and *Marrakesh Express* by Crosby, Stills, and Nash. Oh – and there was something, I don't remember what, by the Jackson 5, with Michael Jackson singing the lead in his pre-teen soprano.

Of course, we didn't spend all our time driving around in the forest. Sometimes we were at the Forest Service Headquarters in Grass Valley, we occasionally made trips back to Berkeley either for business or because we had time off, and the rest of the time we spent in and around the house we were renting in Peardale. The house belonged to somebody that worked for the Forest Service in Grass Valley, and we found out about it on one of our early visits there. It was a four-room house that had formerly been occupied by the owner's parents; we rented it for $50 a month. Peardale was hardly a town or even a village – it was what you would call a "place." The house was located just off the Grass Valley-Colfax highway, which (as I remember it) was lined with big pine trees. Somebody said it reminded them of Tennessee, but I can't say that I could see why. The local agriculture was of the irrigated variety, and – as you might guess – involved pear trees, among other things. There was even a pear tree in our back yard – or maybe it was just across the fence in the adjacent pasture. Pears don't ripen on the tree, and we never got any, but this did not deter the horse that inhabited the pasture – it crunched many a pear, green or not.

Among our four rooms was a kitchen, so Louis and I undertook to cook for ourselves. This was about my first experience with cooking for myself – I had fixed myself breakfast at home and could boil water and broil meat and had gained some idea of how the rest of it was done from observation – but I was miles ahead of Louis. I think I had been under the delusion that because French cuisine was famous, all Frenchmen were born chefs. Louis quickly dispelled this idea. Inexperienced as I was, I knew that the way to fry pork chops – remember, they had considerably more fat on them back then – was not to start by pouring a half-inch of oil in the skillet. But Louis didn't. So he didn't know how to drive and he didn't know how to cook either, but somehow I survived his efforts at both. After supper, I would often sit out on the back steps in the cool of the evening playing the guitar I had bought the previous winter with my first paycheck as a teaching assistant. Otherwise, one of the neighbors had a swimming pool fed from the irrigation ditch, so sometimes we would go swimming. About the only other thing I remember was that one sunny afternoon (pretty much all afternoons were sunny, as I think I previously mentioned) I took a walk on the highway down a long hill to a stream that flowed over a gravel bed and was used by the locals as a swimming hole. I didn't go swimming that time. Rather I climbed back up the hill and got home very, very thirsty. I wasn't very sensible about matters like that back then.

Culture and Conflict

Berkeley was the only place I ever went back to. It was the only place I ever wanted to go back to. It was the only place I was ever homesick for. Why did that first stay in Berkeley make such an impression on me? After all, I had been there something less than eighteen months – more like fifteen if you excluded the time in the Sierras. Why was it something I wanted to last indefinitely? I think there were three major reasons. The first was the academic and cultural atmosphere on the Berkeley campus. The second was my sense of social connectedness. And the third was the attraction of the counterculture and the atmosphere of political radicalism.

I have been closely associated with three universities. Two of them were characterized by a sense of inferiority – a sense that they were less than they aspired to be academically and culturally and, as a result, there was a pervasive feeling of frustration. The University of California Berkeley was the exception. There was a settled conviction that this was a world-class institution – perhaps the best in the world academically – and that culturally, Berkeley was where whatever was happening was going to happen. The result was a sense of intellectual freedom and confidence, a sense of limitless possibilities. I was enjoying myself intellectually, I was studying what I really wanted to study, and my imagination was stimulated by what was going on around me.

As for my social life, about all that was missing was a girlfriend. I had made contact with the local church soon after I arrived in town and found that there was a sizable group of people in their twenties – students and recent graduates – in attendance. That was my primary social group on weekends. The older members were friendly and hospitable – my young friends and I spent many a Sunday afternoon at one or another of their houses: a home-cooked meal and games or conversation afterwards. This was the most racially-integrated congregation I was ever associated with – it was about 50-50 black and white – and the atmosphere of harmony that prevailed was refreshing in contrast to the racial turmoil in the country at large. My other major social group was my fellow graduate students in the transportation engineering program. This was a diverse group: about half of them were from various parts of the United States; the rest were from various foreign countries. The mix was somewhat different from what you would expect now: there were a lot of people from Western Europe – British, French, and German primarily – and the Middle East – from Israel, Iran and the various Arab countries. There were several Canadians and a few Latin Americans, especially Brazilians, and a scattering of students from East and South Asia – mostly Taiwan or Japan. Except for some Yugoslavs, there was almost no one from the Communist countries. We were thrown together a great deal in those days because most of the classes in the Transportation program were held at the Richmond Field Station, which was remote from the campus and accessed by a bus that took us there from campus in the morning and back in the afternoon. The conversation was stimulating because of our common academic and professional interests, the contact with researchers who were excited about what they were doing, and the cosmopolitan flavor of the group.

The attraction the counterculture had for me is a little harder to explain. I was always an observer, not a participant, in the cultural trends and political movements that influenced me so strongly. I wasn't really a hippie – certainly not a "street person" as they were more usually designated in Berkeley – although I did let my hair grow, and somebody once accused me of being "hippier than thou." I never did drugs, nor was I around people who did: only once in my entire stay in Berkeley was I even at a party where someone was smoking marijuana – and that happened during my second stay and was somebody I didn't really know. For me, the real attraction was that the intellectual and esthetic atmosphere of the counterculture liberated my imagination from the tyranny of fact and logic. You didn't have to be high on LSD to have your consciousness expanded. Once the artifacts – the music, the art, etc. – were out there, it didn't matter that they had been originally suggested by artificially-altered states of consciousness. Anybody could grasp them and reproduce them with no more than a natural imagination.

As I said, I was mostly an observer. One of the things I observed, of course, was just the general scene: the kinds of people one encountered, how they were dressed, how they walked, what things sounded like, what they smelled like. I noticed, for instance, that street people where very nonchalant about how they crossed streets. They didn't look both ways before they crossed the street, they didn't hurry, they were apt to jaywalk, and they might cross against the light. They seemed to have supreme confidence in the California law that said pedestrians had the right of way in crosswalks, and they almost dared people to run over them. I never saw one hit, though, so maybe they were on to something. Even though I never smoked it myself, I became familiar with the smell of burning marijuana. Going down Telegraph Avenue, you would encounter individuals standing on street corners going, "Lids…lids" but they were outnumbered about ten to one by people going, "Spare change?...spare change?" So panhandlers were more common than dealers by a considerable margin. The clothes were mostly scruffy-bell bottom jeans, tie-dyed T-shirts, and the like. But you never saw anybody sleeping in the open – for the most part, homelessness as we know it dates from the 1980s. People might well be sleeping on somebody's couch or in a sleeping bag on the floor, but there was always a roof over their heads – the term "street people" referred to the fact that they weren't students and they mostly hung out on the streets, not that they lived there full time.

My impression of the intellectual and esthetic side of the counterculture was mostly the result of what I saw and read. For the esthetic style, one need only see the posters for rock concerts and other events that were plastered all over. For the intellectual, there was a variety of reading material. This ranged from the ephemeral – underground newspapers, handbills, and the like – to popular scholarly works. The best-known of the Berkeley underground papers was the *Berkeley Barb*, but when I first got there, there were several others. These featured the naïve outpourings of counterculture true believers – the kind that really believed that dropping acid led to enlightenment and that anything thought up while stoned was a truly profound discovery. For some reason, the example I remember best is a recipe for "Atomic Rice" submitted by some girl. She had put brown rice on to cook while stoned, and through inattention had let it burn. Whereupon she poured cold water on it and was rewarded by an impressive mushroom-shaped cloud of steam. And, of course, the delectable flavor of burned brown rice! That was from one of the lesser underground papers. As for the *Barb*, it was never that far underground: it actually made money and it eventually degenerated into a sheet whose chief attraction was its personal ads related to various kinds of kinky sex.

At the other end of the spectrum from the underground press were the popular and/or scholarly books. There was a great outpouring of works by scholars and journalists purporting to explain the counterculture and its significance, and there were also some older – and thoroughly serious – works that were cult favorites. For the most part, these latter were held to have either foreshadowed the drug culture or to have described other kinds of altered states of consciousness that reminded the druggies of their own experiences. On the literary side, these included Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* and Aldous Huxley's *Doors of Perception*; the best-known of the scholarly works were probably the Evans-Wentz translations of Tibetan Buddhist works, particularly the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. I had access to the Evans-Wentz books because my landlady Ruth was into the occult and had all sorts of books like that which she was happy to let me read. I read the *Book of the Dead* and a couple of the others that described Tantric Buddhist practices. Also, I read a Gnostic treatise called the *Book of Pistis Sophia*. These satisfied my curiosity, but otherwise they didn't make much of an impression: I had my own religious belief system and they were too remote from both my cultural background and my everyday experience to be really credible.

And then there was the radical atmosphere. It was somehow related to the counterculture, but hardcore radicals were a different breed from flower children. When I arrived in Berkeley in 1968, the big causes on the national scale were opposition to the Vietnam War and racial violence. I suppose there must have been anti-war demonstrations but, strange to say, I don't remember anything about them. Of course, the war wasn't a very controversial topic in Berkeley – almost everybody was against it, and the ones who weren't kept quiet. As for race relations, the Black Panthers were certainly in evidence – Oakland was one of their strongholds and the scene of shootouts with the police – but their presence was mostly felt through threatening graffiti on construction fences and their fundraising activities. Their big cause at the moment was the Huey Newton trial (the aftermath of one of the shootouts) and their fundraising ostensibly was for his legal defense. The way they went about it was to set up on back streets where there was some foot traffic but not too much. In front there was a folding table with their hand-lettered FREE HUEY sign taped to it and two or three women sitting behind it. It was their job to solicit the funds from passersby. Behind them would be two or three big guys with their arms folded and hostile expressions on their faces. Their job was to glare at you and hopefully intimidate you into giving something. It didn't work with me: I resented the intimidation and they didn't really scare me. And I hope that whatever they collected really did go to pay for Huey's lawyers and didn't just wind up in somebody's back pocket.

The causes that really got Berkeley stirred up were more local in nature. The first of these was the Third World Strike during the winter quarter of 1969. At that time, ethnic studies programs were a new idea, and as best I remember it the Third World Strike came about because some African-American, Chicano, and Asian-American radicals got together to demand that the university establish such programs forthwith. I don't remember exactly how it got to be a strike – I suppose they were refusing to attend classes until they got their way – but being a strike, it did involve picketing and demonstrations.

One of my memories of the Third World Strike is that of stepping out of the Richmond Field Station bus into a cloud of tear gas at south entrance to the campus. I was already familiar with the smell of tear gas. I think I mentioned that I had no trouble in believing in police brutality because I had witnessed some back in Florence. This happened one summer when I was back home from Vanderbilt. There were a couple of small apartment buildings diagonally across the street from our old place on Belle Meade Avenue, and one night the tenant of one of them, a big guy, got drunk with his little shrimp of a friend and decided that what he should do was to shoot his shotgun up in the air. This little disturbance drew a whole crowd of police to quell it. You could tell the cops were scared that he might turn the shotgun on them. They were hiding behind their squad cars and yelling and cursing at him, telling him to come out a fight like a man, which he prudently refused to do. Eventually they shot tear gas into the apartment (which is how I got familiar with its odor), whereupon the little guy surrendered. Then the police cuffed him and beat the crap out of him, although he wasn't resisting, which is where the brutality came in. Eventually the big guy surrendered too, and the excitement was over.

But I digress. Another thing I remember about the Third World Strike is a picket line I saw. A bunch of radical-looking people were picketing at the top of the Sproul Hall steps waving their picket signs and chanting:

POW-er to the PEO-ple!
POW-er to the PEO-ple!
WHO are the PEO-ple?
WE are the PEO-ple!

In other words, power to us.

And then came the spring quarter and the People's Park, probably the biggest of all Berkeley disturbances – bigger even than the Free Speech Movement. The origins of this conflict went back several years. The University had acquired – presumably by condemnation – and cleared a tract of land in the South Campus area with the intention of constructing a high-rise dormitory complex. This tract was bounded by Dwight Way, Bowditch Street, Haste Street, and the backs of commercial properties along Telegraph Avenue; it had been occupied by a number of old houses that had reputedly been rented to mostly non-students – i.e. street people and other undesirables (from the point of view of the university administration). Tastes in housing were changing rapidly, however, and dorm occupancy had decreased, so the university put the project on hold. The tract was used as an informal parking lot and became something of a muddy eyesore. Sometime early in the Spring 1969 quarter – it must have been sometime in April – a group of street people and/or radicals – it was hard to tell which was which – decided to seize the land and turn it into a park, which they referred to as the People's Park. They planted shrubs and flowers, constructed homemade playground equipment, and proceeded to hang out there with their dogs, children, and fellow ne'er-do-wells.

The idea caught the fancy of many in the university community, if not that of the administration. With the exception of the campus itself, there was no public open space in the immediate South Campus neighborhood, and so it could be argued that the park served a useful function. Esthetically, it was on the crude and rustic side, but that was a refreshing change from the relative sterility of official public parks with their carefully watered-and-mowed grass and well-tended shrubbery. And almost everybody agreed that the park was better than the vacant lot had been. And, of course, the seizure of the land was an act of defiance of authority – with precedents running back to the Diggers during the seventeenth century English Revolution – and as such gratified the subversive instincts of the student body and a fair share of the faculty. Had the university administration been possessed of more imagination – or been under less pressure from on high to eradicate those un-American radicals – it might have declared the plot a lab and set the sociologists and city planners and artists to work studying the phenomenon – there could have been symposia on it, journal papers, and even a few monographs.

But as it was, the administration reacted negatively. It wanted its property back. It was hoping to avoid violence, bloodshed, and destruction of private property in the vicinity – remember, it had just gone through the turmoil of the Third World Strike, and there was still plywood up where the display windows of businesses on Telegraph Avenue had been broken in the course of that confrontation – so it undertook to negotiate with the leaders of the group occupying the park. These negotiations didn't get very far, since there was a fundamental disagreement about who was going to control the land, but the Chancellor did promise that they "wouldn't come in the middle of the night" to take back the park. After several weeks of this, the Chancellor went out of town to go to a professional meeting (he was a political scientist, if I remember correctly) and while he was away – somehow I think it was a Thursday, but I don't remember for sure – the administration struck, not in the middle of the night but at dawn, cleared the park of anybody that had camped overnight there, and set a contractor to work putting up a chain-link fence around the property. News of this dastardly deed spread rapidly across the campus that morning by means of leaflets and word of mouth, and we were given to understand that there would be a rally that afternoon on Sproul Plaza.

To understand what follows, you need to know a little more about the geography of the Berkeley campus. The main entrance on the south side is at the intersection of Telegraph Avenue and Bancroft Way. Just north of this is Sproul Plaza, which is flanked on the east by Sproul Hall (the university administration building) and on the west by a building belonging to the Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC) that contains a bookstore, cafeteria, and other facilities. In front of Sproul Hall is a set of steps leading to its main entrance, and these steps (or the porch at the top) traditionally served as a speakers' platform during rallies, demonstrations, and such-like affairs. For instance, the plaza and the steps were famous in the lore of Berkeley for having been the principal scene of the Free Speech Movement. At the north end of the plaza was a bridge across Strawberry Creek, and over the bridge was an ornamental arch known as the Sather Gate, a major campus landmark. The principal north-south passageway of the campus extended north of the Sather Gate past buildings such as Wheeler Hall and the library and eventually led to the North Gate at the intersection of Hearst

Avenue and Euclid Avenue. Intersecting this passageway just north of Wheeler Hall was a major east-west passage known as Campanile Way that ran from the West Gate area to the Sather Tower, otherwise known as the Campanile, another major campus landmark.

On the fatal afternoon, a large crowd had gathered on Sproul Plaza to attend the rally that had been announced that morning. The Associated Students President was addressing the assembly, and came to a point in his speech where he intended to outline the crowd's options. He said that the first of these was, "We could take the park!" The crowd didn't wait to hear any more but began to pour down Telegraph Avenue toward the park, presumably intending to dislodge the police that were guarding it and demolish the university's new fence. A full-scale riot was on. For the most part the results were typical of such affairs: a lot of yelling and shouting, broken windows down Telegraph Avenue, lots of tear gas, and numerous minor injuries and arrests. But this time there were some real casualties: one dead and another seriously injured – blinded – as a result of police gunfire. The crowd didn't succeed in taking the park: the police called in reinforcements and a full-scale battle broke out.

While all this was going on, I was at work. I was serving as a teaching assistant in charge of a surveying lab that was meeting that afternoon. We were conducting the lab on the lawn over by the west entrance to the campus. We were already underway before the rally started and hence knew nothing of what had happened, but as the afternoon went by, it was clear to me that something pretty big was going on. We could see a little bit down Oxford Avenue, the street that runs along the western edge of the campus, and I could see whole fleets of police cars arriving, sirens blaring. At one point fairly late in the afternoon, I looked up Campanile Way and could see police chasing people and firing tear gas canisters. Once the lab was over and the equipment put away, I went down to the area where I had seen the police. By this time everything was over for the day: there were no police in sight and only a few people around. What I did see, though, was a panel truck with dents in its side that were pretty obviously the result of having been hit by buckshot – and a number of shell casings. The police were to maintain that they had not discharged any weapons on campus, but I know what I saw.

There followed something of a state of siege for the next week or two. This involved crowds forming and the police trying to break them up. Among the reinforcements that the police had called in were the Alameda County Sheriff's Department and the National Guard. Of the forces of law and order, the Alameda Sheriff's Deputies had the worst reputation. They were known as the "Blue Meanies" (after the villains in an animated film by the Beatles) because they wore blue jump suits and had a reputation for excessive violence. Common report had it that they were the ones who had fired the shotguns. Under the conditions, you might think that the authorities' number one priority would be protection of lives, followed by protection of property, and finally restoration of order so that business as usual could resume. That was not the case, however. The police evidently saw their chief role as asserting the authority of the powers that were, and hence defeating the ringleaders of the disturbance by dispersing the crowds. The way they went about this, however, didn't make much sense. Whenever a small group of people would assemble, they would show up in full riot gear. Now a policeman (or National Guardsman) in full riot gear – helmet, gas mask, flak jacket, shotgun or tear gas grenade launcher, and jack boots, is quite a sight, so people would stop to gape at them; others, assuming that their presence meant that something exciting was about to happen, would stop by to see what was going on. Pretty soon, the small group of people would turn into a large crowd, and eventually the rock-throwing and tear gas would start. To make matters worse, the police would try to keep the crowds from going places they didn't want them to go by blocking exits from the area, thus preventing people from leaving.

This strategy reached its absurd – and outrageous – extreme about a week or so into the "state-of-siege" period. One of the remarkable aspects of being in Berkeley in those days was how utterly peaceful and calm things could be only a little way away from a disturbance. On this particular afternoon, I had gone to the Faculty Glade, a beautiful little lawn over by the faculty club and a short distance up Strawberry Creek from the Sather Gate. There everything was serene, except for the fact that there was a helicopter overhead making a racket. I don't remember whether the helicopter belonged to the police or the National Guard, but it had been circling over the campus every day since the initial riot, and the noise it made interfered with thinking and studying and contributed to the almost-holiday atmosphere that prevailed – who could attend to normal business when you couldn't hear yourself think? After a while, I decided to go over to Sproul Plaza to see what was going on. When I got there, there was a pretty big crowd, and I could see that the police had blocked off both the Telegraph and Bancroft intersection and the Sather Gate. Pretty soon, they had completely surrounded the plaza, and they weren't letting anybody leave. I wasn't sure what was going to happen, but I thought I'd be better off somewhere else, so I made use of a little informal footpath I knew about and scrambled across Strawberry Creek to mingle with a smaller crowd that was on the other side. All at once the helicopter started to make passes over the plaza, each one lower than the one before. And then it started spraying tear gas over the crowd. At this point I left, along with those around me. We were out of the main drop zone, but we still got a pretty good dose of it. Meanwhile, the gas was drifting over the campus and entering buildings through open windows, which put an end to whatever normal activities were still going on.

After the infamous gassing of Sproul Plaza, things settled down a little. The "people" turned their attention elsewhere and began to build what they called the "People's Park Annex" on a strip of land along Hearst Avenue west of campus that had been cleared by the Bay Area Rapid Transit District in order to build a cut-and-cover tunnel. The tunnel construction was complete, and the land was sitting vacant. BARTD, perhaps having learned from the experience of the university administration, played it cool and didn't try to interfere with the park builders. The last major event of the People's Park affair was a march organized by the leaders of the park-making movement that went from campus down to the People's Park Annex. This happened in late May – probably sometime around Memorial Day. And eventually, I went off for the summer to the Sierras to chase logging trucks.

The final irony is that once the university administration had regained their property, they couldn't do anything with it. They well knew what would happen if they ever took the fence down, even though they had bulldozed away what the "people" had built. Eventually – several years later – they ended up deeding the property to the city of Berkeley to be used as a park that is called to this day – officially – People's Park. But, alas, it isn't the funky original – it's just another ordinary park with well-watered grass and picnic tables.

After that, things settled down. When I got back from the mountains, I moved into a room in an old house on Benvenue Avenue. I graduated with my masters degree in December and went to work as a "research engineer" – actually a glorified research assistant – for the Forest Service project. I was to report for active duty in the Army in early May. Around the first of the year, I moved to the house on 60th Street in Oakland that I shared with a couple of my church friends. This was a black neighborhood, and we were about the only white people on the block, but that was OK. One thing I remember is playing my banjo and singing *John Henry* for some of the neighborhood kids on our balcony. But mostly they didn't bother us and we didn't bother them. Of course, we had a kitchen, so I continued the cooking career I had begun in Peardale. Each of us would fix supper in turn. I don't remember what I fixed, but one of my roommates invariably made well-done round steak, Brussels sprouts, and carrot and raisin salad. But I survived.

Then May came, and I went off to report for active duty at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. The timing was such that I was en route when the Cambodian Invasion and the Kent State Massacre went down, so I missed the largest protest of all. Report had it that even the unflappable College of Engineering shut down for that one. After the eight-week Engineer Officer Basic Course at Fort Belvoir, I was stationed in Newport News, Virginia – a place I will describe later – as a traffic engineer for the Traffic Engineering Division of the U. S. Army Transportation Engineering Agency, which was part of the Military Traffic Management and Terminal Service. However, I always intended to return to Berkeley, although I have conflicting memories about just when I decided this and whether it always included going back to school for a PhD. One piece of evidence is that I was careful to maintain my California residency from the start. I bought a used car just before I left Fort Belvoir, and I was careful to register it in California, even though this involved considerable hassle. Also, I undertook to audit a French course at a local community college, under the impression that I would have to pass a foreign language proficiency test as part of a PhD program. I am unclear about just when I started, but I think it must have been in September 1970, since I remember I finished both semesters, which I couldn't have done if it had been 1971-72 because I left Newport News in May, 1972. On the other hand, I distinctly remember that one thing that influenced my decision to return to school was that I encountered some questions in the course of my work that my fellow employees couldn't answer; the only people I knew who could were my old professors back at Berkeley, so I figured that if I was going to know what I was doing, I had better go back where the research was being done. It is possible that I hadn't decided definitely to go back for the PhD when I first got to Newport News, but I sure was being careful to keep that option open.

Changes

And so, I came back some time during the summer of 1972. I got out of the Army in May, made a quick trip to Berkeley to take care of some business, spent seven weeks in New York trying (unsuccessfully) to peddle songs, and then visited my sister Eleanor in Canton, Ohio, my parents in Florence, and a friend in Dallas before going back to Berkeley to stay. I had high expectations. As I have said, Berkeley was the only place I was ever homesick for, and I thought it was going to be wonderful to be back. But everything had changed. Well – almost everything. The academic and cultural self-assurance was still there, but my personal circle of friends had mostly broken up and the radical and countercultural excitement was mostly over. The Vietnam War was winding down – which explains why I was out of the Army – and the last protest occurred about the time I got back to Berkeley. After a bit of looking around, I rented a one-bedroom apartment about two doors north of the campus on Spruce Street – this was the place that was across the street from Normandy Village – and more or less settled down.

One major change had to do with my church life. While I was gone, quite a few of the students and recent graduates that I had been close to had either left town or left the church. One of my closest friends from the first stay turned out to be gay and decided to come out, as they say. He dropped out of church because he didn't think he'd be accepted, and although I did maintain some contact with him, he mostly drifted out of my life. The guys I had roomed with on 60th Street had left town. A girl I had been close to (in brotherly sort of way) got married under distressing circumstances. The church itself had planted another congregation in the suburbs on the other side of the Berkeley Hills; this proved to be something of a disaster for both groups since both were too small to be really effective. The Berkeley congregation also had a new preacher. I got along with him all right – maybe too well for his own good. He was sort of rebellious (which is probably why I was attracted to him) and the rest of the leadership of the congregation was pretty conservative. He remained a good friend long after he got fired, but defending him and then finding out he really had done most of what he was accused of was a strain. So church went from something positive in my life to something that was rather depressing: a realm of conflict, alienation, and decline.

My other major source of social contact – my fellow graduate students – was somewhat more satisfactory. Of course, a lot of the people I had known before had left, but there were still quite a few of them around, and there were new ones to hang out with. At various times I worked as a teaching assistant or as a research assistant. During my research assistant days, I was working for a small project run by my de facto dissertation adviser, who was a transportation economist. This had to do with producing reports documenting how California financed its highways. He really didn't need research assistants, since the reports were pretty much the same every year except that the numbers changed, but it was a way to support graduate students financially. The practical effect was that I had time on my hands, which I mostly used to socialize with other idle research assistants. By this time, the Institute of Transportation Studies (as it was now called) had moved back on campus from Richmond Field Station. At first, we were housed in what had been a large classroom (with risers for the seats so everybody could see). I was there, sitting between an Israeli and an Egyptian, during the Yom Kippur War in 1973. They mostly managed to not be there at the same time. The Egyptian said, with inimitable Arab logic, that it was a "peaceful war" – by which I think he really meant that it was a just war, at least in his biased opinion.

Eventually the powers that be decided to remodel the room and kicked us out. My adviser took little notice of such things and failed to arrange for space elsewhere for me, so I had to go out hunting on my own. At first, I was assigned, along with several other transportation graduate students, to a room in the basement of Davis Hall with a bunch of structural engineering students. We were used to idling away our time in conversation, but they were an utterly serious lot of drudges and were always shushing us. Plus, it was a pretty depressing place anyway: this was the twentieth-century brutal building with the exposed pipes. Not only were they exposed, they were transparent. They conveyed some sort of brown-colored liquid, the nature of which I dare not guess. Well, we stayed there for maybe a week or so and then discovered a room over in an old redwood-shingle building called Naval Architecture. I think it had once been a drafting room; it was pretty dusty and unfinished-looking, but it had the virtue of being otherwise unused and it was out-of-the-way. We could socialize to our hearts' content. We spent the lunch hours playing bridge, albeit not very skillfully. Later on, I became a teaching assistant again and eventually, during my final year, a lecturer. In these capacities I was housed in an office complex on the fourth floor of McLaughlin Hall that consisted of a central area for the secretaries surrounded by offices. As a teaching assistant, I shared one of the offices with my fellow teaching assistants; as a lecturer, I had an office of my own – but that didn't keep me from talking to people when I should have been working: my door was pretty much always open.

So what did we talk about? As I have said, the glory days of the counterculture and political radicalism were over. The Vietnam War had wound down, but it wasn't quite over. The sexual revolution had finally hit home: unwed motherhood had become respectable. The new big thing on the political and cultural horizon was environmentalism, which especially appealed to us because it was clearly related to the transportation system. But for a couple of years, we mostly had Nixon to kick around, and kick we did. The Watergate scandal dragged on from day to day, and the suspense mounted as new bombshells burst: the Saturday Night Massacre, the revelation that Nixon had documented his villainy by taping his conversations, the deleted expletives, the erased tape. Would they finally get him? Would they find the smoking gun? Would Congress impeach him? And in the midst of all this, Spiro Agnew fell afoul of an unrelated corruption scandal dating back to his days as governor of Maryland and was eliminated as Nixon's designated successor. And finally, there was Nixon's resignation in August 1974. There was plenty to talk about in all this, and we greeted his fall with a sense of satisfaction, if not glee. But we were disappointed when Gerald Ford pardoned him of all his iniquities and he didn't go to jail.

However, we mostly talked about life, each other, the cultural quirks of various nations (always a popular topic in international groups) and, of course, our work. We talked about transportation systems and how they could be modeled and understood, about the various harebrained schemes that have always been popular in the field, about the details of our studies and research, and – as the times of our departures drew near – about job prospects.

My own dissertation research was out of the ordinary. As a PhD student, you had to minor in two areas outside civil engineering and I had chosen economics (with a focus on public finance) and political sScience. My interest in the political side of transportation engineering and planning dated back to my special studies project on the North Nashville freeway controversy during my senior year at Vanderbilt. My dissertation was about political influence in transportation planning, and consisted of a case study of the early years of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which was the Bay Area's first permanent transportation planning agency. I started out with some kind of a formal theoretical framework, but that soon got pretty much abandoned and I began to write a straightforward history. Or rather, investigative reporting being a popular pursuit during those Watergate days, a sort of expose. In my mind, the big story was that the MTC staff leaders were posing as part of the new environmentally-sensitive wave of transportation planners who favored shifting resources from highways to mass transit, but were actually knuckling under to the local Caltrans District with its expansive freeway program. The Caltrans District, I found, had a reputation for technical competence that neither the transit agencies nor MTC could match and, as a result, had an advantage in the technical credibility that was crucial to establishing political influence within the professional community. Neither the transit agencies nor the environmental groups that were lobbying the Commission were able to overcome this advantage, and consequently, there would be no radical change of direction in the Bay Area's transportation development as a result of MTC's presence. The resulting dissertation ran to 563 pages double-spaced, without a single equation – surely a record of some kind for an engineering thesis!

Meanwhile, I had been pursuing a private intellectual project. I think I have mentioned that I took a philosophy course during my last semester at Vanderbilt and enjoyed it immensely. I have also mentioned that my attitude toward engineering was changed for the better by the realization that technology was the driving force behind most modern social, economic, and cultural change. Putting the two together, I conceived the idea of writing a book about technology and ethics. I was young, and the fact that I was wholly unqualified for the task – who could be? – did not deter me. I don't remember exactly when I started to work on this, but I do remember that I was working on it when I was in New York just prior to moving back to Berkeley. During the four years of my second stay there, I spent many hours in the library researching it, read all manner of popular books on contemporary social and cultural trends and the significance of technology, and eventually produced a book-length typed manuscript. I don't recall how much, if any, I worked on it after I left Berkeley, but eventually I lost interest in it – in part because I realized that I didn't know enough about either technology or ethics to do a really good job.

My apartment on Spruce Street was a considerable step up from the places I had lived in during my first sojourn in Berkeley – although it was similar to the apartment I had lived in while I was in the Army. In part, this reflected my improved financial circumstances: not only did I have my pay from my various jobs with the university, but I also had the GI bill and about $10,000 that I had saved from my Army pay – the fruit of military housing and subsistence allowances. Of course I had a kitchen, and I continued my development as a cook. From the start, Berkeley had represented a serious broadening of my culinary horizons. Unlike Florence and Nashville, it possessed a full complement of ethnic restaurants. During my Buena Vista Way days, the one I patronized the most was a Chinese restaurant called the Dynasty that was on Euclid Avenue just across Hearst Avenue from the North Gate of the campus. I became acquainted with a variety of Chinese dishes and even learned to use chop sticks pretty proficiently. Well, it was just an ordinary, blue-collar Chinese restaurant of no more than moderate authenticity, I think, but it was all new to me at the time. Otherwise, there were Mexican, Middle-eastern, and German restaurants around, and if all else failed, there was the university cafeteria down on Sproul Plaza. It was cheap, anyway.

As I mentioned previously, I began cooking for myself (and my roommates) when I was in Peardale and on 60th Street. I had continued to teach myself to cook when I was in Newport News, and had even acquired a cookbook (which we still have), and now my style began to mature. I got into the habit of reading recipes for strategic insight into how dishes were put together, and then making them up as I went along. I found that I could usually imagine how things would taste and (despite an occasional disaster) I could usually make them taste pretty good. Of course, I didn't always eat at home. When I first came back to Berkeley, I normally ate only one or two meals a day. The evening meal was the big one, lunch was more or less optional, and I never ate breakfast. Once I was back in Berkeley and surrounded by restaurants, I took up lunch on a regular basis, but I usually didn't eat that at home. My favorite place was a sandwich shop on Euclid known as the Stuffed Inn that had opened up during the time I was out of town. It was steeped in Berkeley culture: the wallpaper was made of old newspapers, and the sandwiches were named after contemporary (or near contemporary) political figures. The bologna sandwich was the LBJ, the pastrami sandwich was the Huey Newton, the black olive and cream cheese sandwich (really delicious but no doubt bad for you) was the Angela Davis, and so on. They also served two kinds of soup – a vegetarian vegetable soup featuring the leftovers from the sandwiches (the ends of tomatoes and cucumbers) and a split-pea soup. A sandwich, soup, and a cup of coffee was my usual lunch there. The Stuffed Inn was supposedly run by a commune; and when they raised their prices once, I remember arguing with a fellow graduate student about whether "Mr. Stuffed Inn" was a capitalist pig or not. Google Earth informs me that it's still there – still funky after all these years!

Sometime after I got back, I decided to take up eating breakfast. As I didn't want to rush into anything like that, I started with toast and tea. Out of this developed an ambition to become a tea connoisseur – it seemed like a civilized thing to do and it was far cheaper than being a wine connoisseur. The Berkeley Co-op supermarket, which was about four or five blocks away, carried an extensive line of Twining's teas, and I got familiar with most of them. Eventually, I started to eat real breakfasts with eggs and toast – but that was later. I shopped pretty much exclusively at the Co-op, as it was the only supermarket within walking distance. I would buy two bags worth at a time and carry them home, one in each arm. It was tiring, but that sort of exercise does tend to keep your weight down. I understand that the Co-op is no more, at least at that location. That's too bad – it was a thoroughly Berkeley-type institution (complete with a newsletter featuring diatribes against the Luckies and Safeways of the world) and it had the best natural-style chunky peanut butter I've ever tasted.

During my last year in Berkeley, I was hired by the Civil Engineering Department as a lecturer, which entailed a considerable increase in pay. This coincided with an increase in my rent, so I decided to look around for a more suitable apartment. Not that the place on Spruce Street was so bad. It was at the back of the building, and my living room had a view of the Bay – that is, if you overlooked the filling station immediately behind the place. But I had ambitions for something more luxurious, with a fireplace, for instance. I was unsuccessful in finding what I wanted, however, and wound up staying at Spruce Street and paying the higher rent. So what I actually did with my new-found affluence was to buy clothes. Now, despite my long, self-trimmed hair (self-trimmed except when I had job interviews and had to break down and patronize a barber) and moustache, my taste in clothes was rather conservative – and there were stores in Berkeley that catered to that look. Three-piece suits were in just then, and I eventually acquired three of them, plus two sport coats and trousers to match. I also bought a denim creation that consisted of a jacket and a matching pair of pants – more or less Western-style, I guess – that was dangerously close to being a leisure suit. I say dangerously close, because leisure suits (with white shoes) were considered to be the uniform of Middle-American businessmen, particularly salesmen, and as such were an object of scorn in Berkeley and San Francisco. Herb Caen, for instance, the famous columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle (to which I subscribed), had decreed that white shoes were acceptable for men only if they (the men) were Stanford alumni, and then only if they (the shoes) had red rubber soles. Dressing up distinguished me from my students, and the cool climate meant that coats and ties were comfortable most of the time. I have never been so well-dressed since.

During the third year of my second stay in Berkeley, I started looking for academic jobs (what else can you do with a PhD?) At the time, I thought I would be finished with my dissertation by the end of the summer of 1975, so the time had come to look to the future. I had three interviews that spring: one at the University of Colorado at Denver, one at Washington University in St. Louis, and one at the University of Louisville. The first two came to naught because of my incompatibility with incumbent faculty that I would have had to work with – the guy at Washington University especially aroused my scorn and later became an object of ridicule in the form of a song entitled *Mr. Whiteshoes* – see the preceding paragraph – that I still sometimes sing. I got a verbal offer from University of Louisville, however, and went back to Berkeley to wait for the written job offer and to ponder what my life in Louisville would be like. The written offer never came – instead I got a highly apologetic phone call from the department chairman informing me the university's Board of Trust had deleted the position for financial reasons. Shortly thereafter, the person that Berkeley had expected to hire as a lecturer to teach their required undergraduate transportation engineering course changed his mind, and knowing that I didn't have a job for the next year, they hired me instead. The result of all this is that my subsequent life was wholly different from what it would have been if I had gone to Louisville, although it's hard to say exactly how. I think it worked out for the best, but who knows? The more immediate result was that I went back and rewrote my dissertation, spending the whole year doing so and adding substantially to its bulk, if not its quality. During the next year, I interviewed with the State University of New York at Buffalo and finally with San Diego State University. I was really attracted to the program at SUNY Buffalo and probably would have gone there despite the climate, but New York City had gone broke that year, and the state had had to bail them out, so money was tight and I don't think SUNY ever filled the position. In any case, they never made me an offer. San Diego State, however, did work out. This time the deal stood up, so that by August 1976 I was franticly trying to finish my dissertation (there was trouble with the typing – my typist had no concept of how long it would take to get through 563 pages) in time to move to San Diego and start my new job.

NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA

So, I moved to San Diego. But before I tell about that, I need to back up and deal with Newport News, where I spent most of my two years in the Army.

"But please, sir, couldn't we just skip Newport News? It does rather interrupt the flow of the narrative, don't you think?"

No, we couldn't. As much as I would have liked to skip my time in Newport News – or anywhere else that the Army would have been likely to have sent me – it was one of my places, and to omit it would be to compromise the concept of this work. So let us back up to May, 1970.

When I left Berkeley that time, I first went to Florence for a week or so. There I shaved off my moustache and sideburns and got a haircut. As I recall, the haircut wasn't short enough and I had to get another one once I reported for duty. From Florence, I proceeded to Fort Belvoir, Virginia to attend the Corps of Engineers Officer Basic Course. That lasted eight weeks and mostly involved spending time in classrooms, although there was one weekend of fun and games in the woods at Camp A. P. Hill. In the course of the eight weeks, we got visits from representatives of the Office of Personnel Operations, who told us what our initial assignments would be and what we could do if we didn't like them. Mine was to an airborne Engineer unit, but that was never going to happen anyway: airborne assignments were voluntary, and I had no intention of volunteering to jump out of airplanes. Quite aside from other objections I might have had, I had done my ROTC Summer Camp at Fort Bragg, the home of the 82nd Airborne Division, and had developed a decided distaste for airborne troops. I didn't like their attitude – they were entirely too gung-ho, or at least they pretended to be. Either way, I wanted no part of them. So they'd have had to reassign me in any case. I have no idea what my fate would have been had I simply refused the airborne assignment. But OPO had deals for us, one of which was called the Voluntary Indefinite assignment. The indefinite part sounded scary, but actually the deal was that you could choose a special two-year assignment for which you were qualified in exchange for extending the minimum two-year active duty commitment to three years. I wasn't too happy about the extra year, but as they were promising faithfully to send all of us to Vietnam after our initial assignment, and as it just so happened that they had an opening for a traffic engineer in the U. S. Army Transportation

Engineering Agency (USATEA), I decided that discretion was the better part of valor and signed up for it. At the least, it would give the war one more year to get itself over with before they sent me there.

Flat and Humid

USATEA was housed at Fort Eustis, located in Newport News, because that was the headquarters of the Army Transportation Corps. It was part of the Military Traffic Management and Terminal Service, a tri-service organization that was mostly concerned with logistics. Consequently, its ties with the Transportation Corps were somewhat tenuous, and shortly after I got there, we moved off-post to an edifice called the Mariner Building, which was on Warwick Boulevard in Newport News, just a little north of the Mariners' Museum Park. I spent maybe a week living at Fort Eustis in the BOQ; it was summer, it was humid, and the BOQ wasn't air conditioned. I was taking two showers per day, and the surroundings weren't exactly inspiring, so I went out and found an apartment down in Newport News, on Main Street. The upshot was that I spent so little time at Fort Eustis that I let the base sticker on my car expire, and I didn't miss it one little bit. "Living on the civilian economy," as it was called, was held to be a financial hardship, but it wasn't really. You got a housing allowance and a subsistence allowance, and between the two, I could more than feed and house myself. That's why I had $10,000 in the bank when I went back to Berkeley: I had been living on the allowances and saving pretty much all of my base pay.

The city of Newport News is located in the southeast corner of Virginia, and occupies a narrow strip of land on the west side of the Virginia Peninsula – that is, the peninsula between the York and James Rivers. I will normally refer to directions in Newport News as north-south or east-west, with north being inland, but the Peninsula is actually oriented more northwest-southeast. Virginia had consolidated many of its cities with the counties they were in, so that modern Newport News actually consists of all of what was formerly Warwick County. It shared the tip of the Peninsula with Hampton, which included all of the former Elizabeth City County: Newport News was on the west side, and Hampton extended across the tip of the Peninsula to the east. To the north of Hampton, the area east of Newport News was occupied by the town of Poquoson (pronounced "Po-ko-sin"), a semi-rural area at that time. Farther up the Peninsula, beyond Newport News, was Williamsburg. North of Poquoson was Yorktown, a tiny village on the York River, surrounded by the Military Park commemorating the Revolutionary War battle of Yorktown. And across the York River was Gloucester County. Although the Peninsula is usually said to be between the York and James Rivers, the mouth of York River is upstream of Poquoson; between there and Fort Monroe in Hampton the Peninsula actually fronts directly on Chesapeake Bay, and between Fort Monroe and Newport News Point, it fronts on Hampton Roads, the channel between the Peninsula and Norfolk. Norfolk is the major urban center of the area and at that time was the largest city in Virginia. It is surrounded by Portsmouth and Chesapeake on the south and west and by Virginia Beach on the east. Since the 1970s, Norfolk has lost population and suburban sprawl has spread across Virginia Beach (which includes all of what was formerly Princess Anne County in addition to the old beach town) so that it has taken over as Virginia's largest city, with a population of over 400,000.

My sense of Newport News does include this extended area, but to a lesser degree than was the case for some of the other places I have lived. I had a car the entire time. I visited Norfolk, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg several times each and even went on one or two drives out into the remoter hinterland, but I really didn't spend much time exploring the area. So what did I do with my spare time? I can hardly remember. I must have done some reading, I know I played my guitar and wrote songs, and I explored my immediate neighborhood on foot.

As I have said, I lived in an apartment in a building on Main Street. What it was supposed to be the main street of, I'm not sure; it certainly wasn't the main street of Newport News' historical downtown area, which was several miles farther down toward the end of the Peninsula. It was probably the main street of Hilton Village, a former government housing project intended to house shipyard workers – during World War I, I think it was. By the time I got there, Hilton Village had been softened by age and private ownership and was actually one of the nicer areas around – it had an air of comfortable quaintness about it. Main Street ran from the shore of the James River, where there was a small public park with a pier, across Warwick Boulevard and Jefferson Street, the main north-south streets in Newport News, to the Hampton city limits at Newmarket Creek, where it changed its name to Todd's Lane. The building I lived in was less than a block from Newmarket Creek, so I was barely in Newport News, which is just a little more than a mile wide at that point.

On the other side of Newmarket Creek, there was a rather extensive undeveloped area, and this was my favorite place to explore on foot. I would go there on weekends and on Wednesday afternoons when we military types had a half day off for "physical training." I'm sure many of my fellow soldiers didn't do anything particularly physical with the time, but I would go running in my combat boots (which is how you had to do it for the PT test) in the area across Newmarket Creek. The creek itself was actually a concrete-lined ditch. There was at least one lateral ditch that came in from the east, and some power lines. In any case, there were these ditch-bank areas that were wide enough to serve as roads, plus some footpaths. The area was covered with mixed hardwood-pine woods. I remember finding holly trees and wild grapes – either muscadines or fox grapes, whichever it is at that latitude. One of the footpaths led to the back side of Bethel High School (so called because it was on Big Bethel Road); another, if you followed it far enough, led to what appeared to be a flooded borrow pit near where Big Bethel Road crosses Interstate 64. This was a pretty desolate place in those days, a dumping ground for trash and rusted-out car bodies. Google Earth informs me, however, that the City of Hampton has since rehabilitated it and made it the centerpiece of what they call a nature park.

The year I arrived in Newport News must have been a dry one, because the Newmarket Creek woods were dry. But later, it may have been that winter, the owner of the land began to log it. The logging was selective, but they were sending bulldozers throughout the tract to skid the logs. Then it started to rain, and water began to collect, not only in the bulldozer tracks, but also in other low spots – the whole place was a swamp! Which probably explains why it hadn't been developed. It has been since, though. Except for Hampton's nature park, it's now all houses. But I wonder: do they flood?

About the only other place I was able to get out in the wild, so to speak, was in the watershed area around the Newport News Reservoir. This was located at the north end of town, near the entrance to Fort Eustis, and was maintained as a park, with campgrounds, a golf course, and hiking trails. It adjoined the Yorktown unit of the National Colonial Historical Park that preserved the Revolutionary War battlefield. I think I was up there a couple of times. One time I got all the way over to the battlefield. The watershed area was also the site of an encounter with a feral dog pack. They were barking and snarling, so I picked up a stick off the ground. Upon my brandishing this, they turned tail and ran, and after they left, I tossed the stick back on the ground, and it broke in two. It was that rotten, and I'm very lucky that I didn't need to actually hit a dog with it!

Otherwise, I did most of my exploring in the built up areas around where I lived. I would walk down to the river and then up towards the Mariners Museum Park. There was a lake there, and I dimly remember walking along its shore and looking at the little fish (probably bluegills) in the shallows. Otherwise, I visited Norfolk a few times for the urban ambience, walking down Granby Street and along the waterfront to a neighborhood called Ghent. As I remember it, Ghent had some old decaying mansions and was inhabited by a few hip-looking people, so it felt more like my kind of place than the rest of the area. I also went to the beach at Virginia Beach two or three times, getting badly sunburned on at least one occasion, and I went once or twice to Buckroe Beach in Hampton, on Chesapeake Bay. And I went to Colonial Williamsburg a few times. It was interesting in a touristy sort of way, but as I look back on it, it definitely felt staged, a reproduction and/or restoration, not the real eighteenth century place.

Homesick for Berkeley

But the bottom line where Newport News is concerned is that I didn't much like the place. Shortly before I left to go back to Berkeley, a fellow lieutenant and I got together and undertook to parody the old sea chanty *What Shall We Do with a Drunken Sailor?* After numerous fiendish tortures, the very worst thing we could think of to do to the sodden wretch was:

Put him ashore in Newport News, boys,
Put him ashore in Newport News, boys,
Put him ashore in Newport News, boys,
Early in the morning!

Sail away and leave him stranded,
Sail away and leave him stranded,
Sail away and leave him stranded,
Early in the morning!

Now, to be fair about it, I probably wouldn't have liked any place the Army sent me, because I didn't like being in the Army in the first place. However, I had my reasons for not being pleased with Newport News and vicinity. Topographically, it was by far the flattest place I've ever lived. The nearest hills were around Williamsburg, and they didn't amount to much. I marvel that they found enough relief to build the reservoirs or the lake in the Mariners Museum Park. In the vicinity of where I lived, the highest ground was along the shore of the James River; from there it sloped back, very gradually, to Newmarket Creek. So the scenery was pretty boring.

Economically and culturally, the whole Hampton Roads area was dominated by the military and by defense contractors. All three service branches were represented: the Army had Fort Eustis and Fort Monroe; the Air Force had Langley Air Force Base, which it shared with NASA; and the Navy had Norfolk Naval Station (the headquarters of the Atlantic Fleet), Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Oceania Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach, and various other installations scattered about. The only bright spot was that there weren't any Marine installations, although there were some Marines around, since the Navy used them for things like MP duty. I didn't like Marines: in my estimation they were even more insanely gung-ho than the Airborne, and I didn't approve of people like that. Besides the military itself, the big industry in Newport News was the shipyard, and it subsisted almost entirely on defense work. A good indication of the local character was a political ad by one of the area's Congressmen: it showed a picture of him standing in front of the entrance to the Newport News Shipyard, with the caption, "You can trim the fat but don't cut the muscle." In other words, "I'm a fiscal conservative, but leave my pork alone!"

So the landscape was flat and boring, the cultural ambience was military-industrial, the architecture was undistinguished – mostly brick ranch-style and fake colonial, and the weather – well, to be honest, the weather wasn't that much different from that in Florence or Nashville, but it did have a couple of nasty features that were all its own. For instance, there were hurricanes. As best I remember, there were two of them while I was there. I don't remember much about them, just considerable wind and lots of rain. Maybe they had dropped below hurricane force by the time they got there. And there was the great blizzard. It started early one Friday morning toward the end of March – or was it already April? The leaves were starting to come out, as I remember. It wasn't all that cold, just enough so that the snow would stick, but there was a strong wind and lots and lots of snow. By noon, they decided to send us home from work, so I got to drive through the worst of it. The roads weren't particularly slick, but it was snowing so hard I could barely see. Somehow or other I managed to make it down Warwick Boulevard, get turned onto Main Street, and make it home without running into anything. There was a lot of snow on the ground Saturday morning – at least a foot if memory serves me right – but it was mostly gone by Sunday afternoon.

But the main reason I didn't like Newport News – besides the fact that the Army had sent me there – was that my social life was pretty well confined to people I worked with. The way this arose was that, unlike in Nashville or Berkeley, I didn't have a church-related set of friends. When I first came to Newport News, I had sought out the local Church of Christ and had attended a midweek bible class for young adults that was taught by the preacher. I don't remember ever going to this class but once, because somehow that evening the discussion got around to the Marriage at Cana, and the preacher said that what Jesus turned the water into was fresh grape juice, not real wine, and that we could necessarily infer this from the fact that we all know that drinking alcohol is sinful, and Jesus would neither sin nor aid and abet sinning. Or, at least, that's how I remember his position on the subject now. I objected that in that case the story didn't make much sense, especially the part about the ruler of the feast telling the bridegroom that most people would have served the best wine first and brought out the cheap stuff after the guests had drunk. My point was about reasonable understanding of the text and intellectual honesty; his was about the evils of demon rum and the temptations faced by us young military types – although after all these years, I realize he was trying to maintain his authority and I was challenging it. In any case, the discussion got pretty tense – enough so that I had a stomachache after it was over. When my fellow young adults didn't support me, I concluded that I wasn't going to fit in with this bunch. I did continue to go to church on Sundays – the options of going to a different kind of church or none at all didn't really occur to me – but I just sat there and didn't interact with anybody. I was a perpetual visitor: I never felt a part of that congregation and I never got to know anybody there. Several years later, towards the end of my second stay in Berkeley, I ran into a guy that had been a student at the University of Virginia. He told me the preacher in question had a statewide reputation for being "conservative," but I'd say his real problem was that he was combative.

I did try a couple of other ways to meet people outside work. As I previously mentioned, I audited a beginning French class at Christopher Newport College, at that time two-year institution that was a satellite of the College of William and Mary. One reason I enrolled was that I thought I would have to pass a foreign language test if I went back to Berkeley to pursue a PhD; the other reason was that I was hoping to meet girls. Alas, the class was a failure on both counts – Berkeley had dropped the test requirement by the time I got back, and since I wasn't taking the course for a grade, I didn't learn much French – and I didn't meet any girls, either. I also attended the meetings of a folk music club; I got the lyrics to some songs, but I don't remember making any friends.

So that left work people as my last resort. As I think I have already mentioned, USATEA was a tri-service organization. It was also a mixture of military and civilian employees. There was a military officer (an Army colonel as best I remember) over the whole operation, but the Traffic Engineering Division was headed by a high-level civil service employee. The division consisted of two branches, also headed by civilians. Under them were a number of engineers, some of whom were civilians and others junior military officers like me, technicians (all of whom were civilians), and a couple of civilian clerical employees. We also interacted with support personnel who served the entire USATEA organization: report editors, draftsmen, etc. Some of these were civilians and some were military enlisted men. (I say drafts*men* and enlisted *men* advisedly – so far as I remember, none of them was a woman.) There were also some military enlisted personnel whose role I don't clearly remember. What we in the Traffic Engineering Division did was to go around to military installations of all types and write traffic reports. These were of two types: comprehensive traffic studies, in which we gathered and analyzed various standardized types of data and made general recommendations about future traffic development for the installation, and traffic impact studies that focused on some specific issue or problem. These were most commonly related to the construction of new facilities, since the approval process for new facilities involved a required study of potential traffic impacts. So, for the most part, we did our studies and wrote our reports, and the locals filed them on a shelf somewhere and let them collect dust. Occasionally, however, we were called in to address a problem that had annoyed someone of sufficient rank, and in those cases, the reports were more likely to be read but were apt to be controversial.

I went into all of this because it affected my work-related social life. The head of the Traffic Engineering Division had a private office and as best I remember the Branch Chiefs did also, but the rest of us were in cubicles. This meant we saw quite a bit of each other. In part this was by design: as a general rule, studies were conducted by two people, one serving as the author and the other as assistant, so considerable collaboration was necessary. It is also important to understand that there was no real distinction between the engineers and the technicians in terms of the work they performed: a technician could be the lead author and an engineer his assistant just as well as the reverse. There was a difference in educational level, and in some cases, in self-confidence. As can be imagined, this arrangement sometimes led to friction, since the technicians felt that they were underpaid and underappreciated. The physical arrangement of the offices was conducive to socializing and the organizational structure was conducive to office politics. As a result, there was quite a bit of both, and since I was able to work quickly, I had time on my hands and spent a lot of it talking to people – to the considerable annoyance of some of my slower and more conscientious officemates.

The two people I felt closest to, and that I spent the most time talking with, were a technician named Charley and one of the editors, a middle-aged woman named Norma or Noreen or something like that – I'm afraid I've forgotten her name. Charley liked to talk, and he was full of homespun wisdom. One time when I was upset with someone downstairs – in drafting, I think – he said, "Jim, you don't get mad at a dog for barking at you." That's stuck with me all these years. Since Charley lived across the York River in Gloucester County, I didn't see much of him outside of office hours. I think I visited him at home only once. Norma (let's call her) lived in Hilton Village, and I did spend considerable time at her house. She had two teenage sons, and I got fairly close to the younger one. It turned out that he had some mental health issues – "adolescent adjustment," I think they called it, although I don't recall ever hearing of that particular diagnosis before or since. He ended up spending some time in a psychiatric facility over in Portsmouth. I went over there once with Norma to visit him. It was a dreary day, and a dreary place. I think that was my first encounter with a mental hospital. I've always wondered how such places could do anybody any good – if you weren't already depressed, just being there would be enough to depress you.

As I said, there was quite a bit of office politics. We didn't get along very well with the production people downstairs, the technicians had a chip on their shoulder, and the secretaries terrorized everybody. It was a good learning experience: I learned that the royal road to peace and contentment in such environments is to get along with the "little" people – you can get away with fighting with the boss, but an angry secretary can ruin you. Well, the big boss – that is, the Division Head in his private office – was a rather remote figure, and not well liked. Some of the dislike was related to the technicians' sense of grievance about their status not living up to their work assignments, but (as might be expected) there was also a sense that people were being pressured to get their reports out in a timely fashion. Eventually – I think it was at some point in my second year there – he decided to make me an "administrative assistant." This mostly meant that I got to be the one who went around checking up on people. Maybe he thought I spent most of my time talking anyway, so why not get some good out of it? I got a little flak occasionally, but on the whole my workmates accepted this arrangement. That probably had to do with the fact that I was a short-timer, and after all, I was one of them.

In addition to such social life as I got by wasting time during working hours, there were a number of more-or-less organized social activities. At lunch, a group of us played penny-ante poker, with the result that my lunch usually consisted of a little bag of peanuts from the vending machine. Also, I remember a couple of organized outings. There was a boiled crab feast over in Poquoson once, where we sat around and picked crabmeat out of the shells and ate it, and there was a deep-sea fishing trip –

also out of Poquoson – on Chesapeake Bay. I don't think I caught anything, but I didn't get seasick, either. And then we had a tennis tournament. I wasn't very good – I think I *almost* won one match.

So that was about the extent of my social life. Outside of working hours, I was learning to cook, and I spent a lot of time sitting around in my apartment, cultivating my mind, as it were. Newport News was the first time I had access to a kitchen that wasn't shared with a roommate. As I have mentioned, I had done some cooking when I lived in Peardale and during the time I lived on 60th Street in Oakland. In both those cases, though, I had confined myself to simple dishes like broiled meat and boiled vegetables. But now I started to branch out. I bought a set of dishes and invested in a Fanny Farmer cookbook, which I still use on occasion. I only ate one meal most days – I didn't have time for breakfast, and lunch, as I have said, was usually a bag of peanuts from a vending machine. I don't remember much of what I fixed, except that there was a little seafood shop right across the street from where I lived, and I would get oysters there and broil them with butter and thyme. I also remember that there was a fancy supermarket in a shopping mall somewhere over in Hampton that had an extensive line of cheeses, so I became something of a cheese connoisseur for a while. If I ate out, I don't remember where or what, although I suppose I must have done so sometimes.

As for the mental cultivation, I read, I started working on my treatise about technology and ethics, and I played my guitar and wrote songs. You might say that my imagination was at its most countercultural during my time in Newport News. At one point, I decided to experiment with meditation. I lit my candle and my incense, sat down in a chair to stare at the candle flame and repeat my homemade mantra – silently, not out loud – and awaited developments. There weren't any developments. I did this for several nights, and as time went on, and nothing happened, I got more and more tense and anxious. Finally one night, the phone rang in the midst of this little exercise and I almost jumped out of my skin. At that point I decided that meditation was doing me more harm than good and gave up the experiment.

I also discovered that Tidewater Virginia was something of an occult hot spot, in part because the psychic Edgar Cayce had lived in Virginia Beach (I think it was). Locally, Norma the Editor and a civilian engineer named John were into the occult. Neither of them was very countercultural, of course – they were both good Methodists, at least on Sunday mornings – but they talked about occult matters. John even claimed to be a prophet, and to demonstrate his powers (when challenged) predicted that there would be tornadoes on a particular weekend during April. He declared himself vindicated when somebody found a two-inch item on one of the back pages of the local newspaper reporting that there had been a tornado somewhere in Florida that Saturday. I wasn't impressed. I figured I could have predicted tornadoes in April without any special powers.

But mostly, my countercultural leanings came out in the songs I was writing. These were based in part on my discovery of chords such as major sevenths and minor sevenths, in part on ideas gleaned from my philosophical and psychological readings, and in part on a deliberate obscurity that hinted that I knew more about the drug culture than I really did. The most ambitious of these was entitled *Flight to Moria*, and compounded air travel and the *Lord of the Rings* with the underground journey motif. It ran about five or six minutes, and I was very proud of it at the time. Looking back on it, all such efforts were fakes – they were products of my intellect, and they didn't reflect my real feelings or situation. I did write a few songs that expressed my loneliness and sense of isolation. I saw myself as an exile who couldn't wait to get back to the Promised Land, but meanwhile was trapped in an alien environment:

The raindrops fiercely splatter –
They are many, I am one,
And emptiness is all the lightening shows.
And morning never comes
For the lepers of this world:

They carry lonesome everywhere they go!

I had an old-fashioned reel-to-reel tape recorder, and I recorded that one with the window open during a thunderstorm. Then there was:

Drifting, restless motion on the oceans of our lives –
The sea winds shift to drive us home.
Ships passing in the fog – an entry in my log –
Tonight I thought I saw a light!

Charley the technician's comment on that one was, "If a fellow was to hear you sing that, he'd have to cheer up to commit suicide!" But probably the best song that came out of my Newport News experience was a musical setting for William Blake's well-known poem *London*. I still sing that one.

Well, so much for my lonely life in Newport News. As you may remember, I had gotten the assignment with USATEA by going "voluntary indefinite," which supposedly obligated me to serve a third year of active duty, supposedly in Vietnam. But by 1972, the war was finally winding down, and the military, never ones to do things by halves, suddenly reversed course: budgets were being cut, a reduction in force (RIF) was declared, and all at once a new push was on to persuade people to leave, instead of coming up with ingenious schemes to get them to extend their commitments. The Army asked who would like to quit, and I happily volunteered. And so, about two weeks after the end of my original two-year commitment, I was out of the Army and on my way back to Berkeley via New York and points in between. And four years later, I was ready to leave Berkeley to go to work in San Diego.

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

The move from Berkeley to San Diego was chaotic, to say the least. I turned in my dissertation, properly typed and with the necessary signatures, on a Friday afternoon. The following Monday morning, I needed to report to work at San Diego State. As best I can recall, I flew down from Oakland on Saturday, rented a car – no mean feat, since I didn't have a credit card – and checked into a motel. Then I drove out to the San Diego State campus and from there through the area south of the campus and then – I don't remember where I went. Or maybe I drove out to campus first and then checked into the motel. By Sunday, I was out looking for an apartment, and as soon as I could the next week, I bought a car – a brand new Honda Civic that cost me all of $3,600 including taxes, registration, etc. I paid cash. I also got myself a credit card as soon as I could. The next weekend, I flew back to Berkeley to finish cleaning out my old apartment and move some of my stuff down. I rode back on the bus and shipped my belongings as baggage on the bus. Neither half of this plan was a good idea – I had caught a cold and my ears stopped up going over the Grapevine grade north of Los Angeles and when I got to San Diego, I found that a lot of my dishes had gotten broken as a result of rough handling. The next weekend I went back to Berkeley one more time to move down the rest of my stuff. This time I drove.

Physical Setting

So I finally succeeded in getting myself moved down to San Diego. My first reaction to San Diego was one of disappointment. Everybody talks about how great the weather is in San Diego, but soon after I got there – I think it was during the first week – a tropical storm hit and it rained pretty hard all day. That wasn't so bad in itself – it broke the usual summer drought and brought out some green on the hillsides. But what followed was a solid month of fog (or "marine layer" as the weather people call it nowadays). It is my recollection – and I don't think I'm exaggerating here – that the sun didn't shine for the entire month of September. This didn't mean that the weather was cool and pleasant, as would have been the case if this had happened in the Bay Area. San Diego marine layer is about ten or twelve degrees warmer than that in Northern California, so the weather was unpleasantly muggy for weeks on end. To make matters worse, the apartment I had rented had no air conditioning (held to be unnecessary in San Diego because of the wonderful weather) and so-called radiant heating – that meant there were wires imbedded in the floor slab, and they produced a certain minimum amount of heat year round. So I was doing a lot of sweating – I would have thought I was back in Newport News if things had been greener.

But they weren't. My apartment was on a street called Streamview Drive, where there was neither a stream nor a view – the stream, such as it may have once been, was in a culvert somewhere under the street. The neighborhood vegetation wasn't very impressive either. Such trees as there were clearly had been imported from somewhere else in the world, survived only because they were watered, and tended to be scrubby. Such natural vegetation as was visible was brush, mostly turned brown at that season of the year. When I got out into it, however, I did notice that it was full of wildlife such as birds and rabbits. But my overall impression was that I had wound up in a desert – albeit a rather humid one – and I didn't particularly like deserts.

All of which goes to show that first impressions can be misleading. For one thing, the weather I was experiencing was very unusual – in the forty-plus years I've lived in San Diego, I've never experienced another September like that one. For another, I hadn't spent much time looking for a place to live, so the one I came up with was in one of the scruffier parts of town. Not that Streamview Drive is exactly a slum, but it's not the sort of place that appeals to discriminating tastes in neighborhoods. And finally, what I did not realize at the time is that much of San Diego's charm lies not in its climate or its architecture, but in the tremendous physical and cultural diversity of the city and its surrounding area.

As is true of my other places – especially Florence – what comes to my mind when I think of San Diego is not just the city itself – extensive as it is – but a considerable region around it. This consists of San Diego County and the western part of Imperial County, bounded by the Mexican border on the south, the Pacific Ocean on the west, Orange and Riverside Counties on the north, and the eastern shore of the Salton Sea and the eastern edge of irrigated land in the Imperial Valley on the east. The diversity of landscapes and biological habitats in this area is nearly unique. Let's see…we have sandy beaches, rocky shorelines, mud flats, salt marshes, freshwater marshes, sage-scrub, chaparral, riparian strips, oak savannahs, grasslands, freshwater ponds and reservoirs, orchards, mountain forests (mixed oak-pine and conifer), high desert, palm oases, low desert, irrigated cropland, and the Salton Sea (which is yet another sort of wetland) – not to mention the San Diego urban forest with its myriad varieties of exotic trees and shrubs. There – I think that about covers it! The local bird checklist runs to somewhere between 400 and 500 species and is reputed to be the most extensive for any area of comparable size in North America. Wild mammals include deer, bighorn sheep, coyotes, badgers, weasels, squirrels, rabbits, other rodents, skunks, opossums, foxes, and bats. I am no expert on insects and reptiles, so I won't try to describe them except to say that there are many different kinds of butterflies and an impressive variety of lizards.

All this diversity is the result of the complex geography of the region. In political, economic and cultural terms, San Diego County is usually spoken of as consisting of the city of San Diego itself; South Bay, which stretches south along San Diego Bay from the city limits to the Mexican border and includes the suburbs of National City, Chula Vista, and Imperial Beach; East County, which lies east and northeast of San Diego between the first range of mountains and Imperial County and includes the suburbs of La Mesa, El Cajon, Spring Valley, Lemon Grove, Santee, and Lakeside, as well as such outlying communities as Alpine, Ramona, Julian, and a number of smaller places; and North County, which extends north from San Diego between the coast and the mountains and includes the old beach towns – now sprawled out into bedroom communities – of Del Mar, Encinitas, Carlsbad, and Oceanside, and the inland communities of Poway, Escondido, San Marcos, and Vista.

Much of San Diego itself is built on a series of marine terraces which have been eroded into a mesa-and-canyon topography. The largest of the canyons, that of the San Diego River, is called Mission Valley. Most of the early urban development in the area took place on the flatter mesa areas, which were originally covered with sage-scrub; the canyons, which featured riparian vegetation (cottonwood, willow, sycamore, and live oak) and various other trees and shrubs, tended to be used as locations for sewer mains and transportation facilities. In a few locations, such as La Jolla and Point Loma, mountains or high mesas extend all the way to the shore, and in these areas the coast is rocky; elsewhere, around the mouths of streams and old wetlands, there are sandy beaches. There are two bays: San Diego Bay, which is separated from the ocean by Coronado and the Silver Strand peninsula, and Mission Bay, originally an area of mud flats that was dredged and turned into a park shortly after World War II. South Bay and North County have similar terrain: marine terraces and foothills cut by canyons, with sage-scrub or chaparral on the uplands, strips of riparian vegetation along the streams, and lagoons at the mouths of the larger ones.

The first range of mountains runs along the eastern border of San Diego, and includes Fortuna and Cowles Mountains and, to the south, Mount Helix. The San Diego River crosses this range in Mission Gorge, which lies between Fortuna and Cowles Mountains. La Mesa, Spring Valley, and Lemon Grove are on the western slope of the range; to the east lie valleys along the San Diego River and its tributaries that are occupied by El Cajon, Santee, and Lakeside. To the east of El Cajon lie the main ridges of the Peninsular Ranges (so named because they extend into Baja California).In most places, these form a tilted plateau with a fairly gradual slope on the west and an abrupt escarpment down to the desert on the east. The crest of this ridge consists of a number of disjointed ranges whose highest elevations exceed 5,000 and, in places, 6,000 feet. These include – from south to north – the Laguna, Cuyamaca, and Volcan Mountains, Hot Springs Mountain, the San Ysidro Mountains, and Mount Palomar and its ridge stretching north past the Riverside County line. Farther east, along the northern border of San Diego County, is the southern flank of the Santa Rosa Mountains. As the underlying geological formations shift from sedimentary deposits to granitic rock, and the elevation and distance from the ocean increase, the native upland vegetation shifts from sage-scrub to chaparral, and then, at the highest elevations to oak-pine forest and mixed conifers. Higher elevations beyond the crest of the Peninsular Ranges are covered with high desert vegetation.

The Peninsular Ranges are oriented generally northwest-southeast. To the east and north of them lies the desert, which in one form or another, stretches all the way to Texas, far south into Mexico, and north to Utah and Nevada. In the San Diego area, this includes the northeastern part of San Diego County and all of Imperial County. The Anza-Borrego Desert State Park – reputed to be the largest state park in the country – includes most of the northeastern part of San Diego County, except for an area of irrigated farmland around the town of Borrego Springs, and spills over in places into Riverside and Imperial Counties. It includes high desert vegetation – junipers and, in favored locations, pinyons – on the slopes of the mountains to the north and west and on isolated ranges scattered throughout the desert basin. The mountains are cut by canyons, and in these canyons are oases of Washington fan palms. At the mouths of the canyons are alluvial fans called bajadas, composed of sand and fragments of rock – up to and including boulders – that have washed down in the process of erosion. They are covered with ocotillo; cactus – including barrel, hedgehog, prickly pear, and cholla; and scattered brush of various sorts. At the very bottom are sandy flats covered by creosote bush, dry lakebeds, and desert washes lined with mesquite, catsclaw, desert willow, and other shrubs and small trees that grow where there is groundwater. Elsewhere, there are deposits of clay, eroded badlands, and great beds of fossil oyster shells. The slopes of the mountains and the walls of the canyons are stained dark brown by so-called “desert varnish,” except where flood waters have scoured the granite rocks clean and left them shining white (well, actually, light gray).

The very lowest part of the desert is the Imperial Valley, an area of farmland that extends south into Mexico and contains the Salton Sea. The Imperial Valley is covered with irrigated fields, feed lots, and agricultural processing facilities; and increasingly, with houses, as agricultural communities such as El Centro, Imperial, Brawley, and Calexico spread out into the fields. The Valley produces a little bit of everything: vegetables, beef cattle, sugar beets, hay (lots of alfalfa), even a few sheep and a little bit of wheat and oats. Its most conspicuous physical feature is the Salton Sea, which occupies a desert basin that had been a lake at various times in the past during wet cycles but was dry at the beginning of the twentieth century. The modern Salton Sea was created by a breach in the head structure of an irrigation canal that occurred during a Colorado River flood in 1905. The flood waters created the New River and eroded its bed into a gash across the flat floor of the valley that now resembles something between a gully and a canyon. The water collected in the Salton Sink, and the resulting lake has since been maintained by irrigation runoff. Someone stocked it with fish, and for a time it was something of a fishing resort. It also became an important resource for wildlife, particularly migratory waterfowl and shorebirds. Over the past twenty or thirty years, however, it has been in a serious state of decline. Algae blooms, increasing salinity, and increasing concentrations of pesticides and fertilizers have long been concerns, but in recent years more efficient irrigation and diversion of water from irrigation to urban use has reduced the inflow; as a result the sea is shrinking and its salinity is increasing rapidly. So far, talk of “saving” it has produced next to nothing in the way of action, and there is fear that it will soon turn into an environmental disaster.

The diversity of habitats in the San Diego area is a result not only of the varied landforms but also the famous San Diego climate. To the west of the mountains, this is a classic Mediterranean climate with a moderate temperature range and distinct wet and dry seasons – wet in the winter and dry in the summer. San Diego, however, is toward the dry end of the spectrum, with rainfall in the downtown area averaging a little more than 10 inches per year. This lack of precipitation is somewhat offset by the presence of low clouds and fog (the “marine layer”) during the dry season, especially late spring and early summer. The local terms for this condition are “May gray” and “June gloom.” The marine layer is the result of prevailing winds from the west and south off the Pacific Ocean; occasionally, however, there are strong winds from the north or east known locally as “Santa Anas”. Santa Anas come in hot and cold varieties: hot ones from August through early November; cold ones in December and January. Because of the drought and the presence of thick chaparral and forest in the back country, the area is subject to major wildfires; among the more devastating ones were those of 2003 and 2007, which among them burned most of the area between the mountains and the edge of the urban area.

Because of the varied terrain, however, temperature, precipitation, and cloud cover vary widely within the region, creating numerous microclimates. In the summer, high temperatures along the coast are generally in the 70s, but they reach the 80s and 90s a few miles inland and the 100s in the inland valleys. Winter lows are generally in the 40s and 50s along the coast, but are often below freezing in the inland valleys. The high mountains may average more than 30 inches of precipitation and usually get snow two or three times during the winter. The deserts are considerably drier than the rest of the region, but they do get occasional rainfall in the winter and from summer thunderstorms that result from moisture from the east and from the Sea of Cortez. The summer thunderstorms can be quite intense, leading to flash floods, as can the heavy rainfalls that result from the tropical storms that occasionally reach the region, including the desert. The desert is normally very hot in the summer with occasional highs above 110 degrees; in the winter, daytime temperatures are usually mild, but it often frosts overnight.

Of course, no physical description of any part of coastal California would be complete without some mention of earthquakes. The San Andreas Fault runs through the Imperial Valley, and the strongest earthquakes that have shaken San Diego in my time have occurred along it. There are other active faults in the San Diego region, particularly the Rose Canyon Fault, but so far they have been quiet; the geologists promise us, however, that sooner or later this will cease to be the case. Other cases in which there has been significant local shaking have resulted from earthquakes in the San Fernando Valley or other parts of the Los Angeles area.

My awareness of this diversity and my experience with the different landscapes and habitats developed over several years. I don't remember how soon I got to the beaches, but it must have been shortly after I arrived. Patches of sage-scrub were all around, but my appreciation of them as a rich biological habitat began one overcast day – it may have been in that gray month of September 1976 – when I wandered up from my apartment on Streamview Drive to the rim of the canyon that lies downstream from Chollas Lake. This place overlooked an abandoned naval facility that was later to become a landfill and still later, a park with a ballfield. At the time, though, there wasn't much there. The Navy's old buildings had been torn down, although the foundation slabs remained, and there was a grove of eucalyptus trees on the floor of the canyon. But up on the canyon rim, it was just the native sage-scrub. I had been reading Thomas Hardy's *Return of the Native*, in which the moor is said to be one of the major characters, so my mind was on the effect of landscapes on human moods. At first glance, my surroundings seemed bleak, but then I noticed the variety of bird life around me. I was so impressed that I went home and wrote a note describing the experience.

An even more dramatic introduction to the real character of the region came in late October. You may recall that my first impression had been that San Diego was a desert with fog and humidity. By October, though, the weather had cleared and one Saturday I went for a drive up into the mountains. I think I may have been following the advice of some kind of tourist guide, but in any case, I drove out Interstate 8 to Highway 79, and from there to Julian, returning via Highways 78 and 67. The stretch from the Interstate up to Julian passes through Cuyamaca State Park, and what I saw there astounded me: trees, big trees! I had no idea anything so lush existed in this corner of the world.

The next week, I went back to the Cuyamacas and parked at the staging area beside the bridge over the Sweetwater River. From there I set out walking – no hat, no water, no sunscreen – just me and my old army boots. I had no idea where I was going. Down in the valley beside the stream, I was passing big pine trees and enormous old live oaks. Then there was a stretch alongside a meadow. Eventually, I came to a fire road that wound up through groves of pines and oaks, and then to one signed as the California Riding and Hiking Trail, that at one point ran through a grove of incense cedars on the side of a canyon. Eventually I came out on a paved access road that climbed steeply through the pines. Some way up this, there was a spring off to the side with an L-shaped piece of metal to channel the water so passersby could drink it. By now I was thirsty, so I drank some. Then I continued on up the hill. Eventually I came to a place where there had been a fire. The vegetation was recovering and consisted of bracken and Coulter Pine saplings. And then I arrived at the shoulder of the mountain, where you could see over to the low country to the west. From there, a sign said that it was a half-mile to the peak, so I turned and continued on up. Now I was above the burn and the road was lined with huge old incense cedars, white firs, and sugar pines. At last I came to the summit of South Peak, on which there was a fire lookout tower. I climbed up to the observation platform, which was occupied by a number of other hikers and a lady who was working as the lookout. From there, you could see back down to San Diego and the Pacific Ocean. Close at hand, the lookouts had installed a hummingbird feeder that was patronized by two or three of the local Anna's hummingbirds. Then I climbed down from the tower, headed back down the fire road to the shoulder and from there took a different route back. I still didn't know where I was going, but I figured that if I kept on going downhill, I would reach my car eventually.

Getting on with Life

My familiarity with other parts of the back country developed over the next three or four years, but this is so closely related to my social life during my early years in San Diego that I need to tell that story first. When I was in Berkeley, my fellow graduate students had been a large part of my social life. When I got to San Diego State, I found out that faculty weren't the same as graduate students: their conversation did not run to life and their research; instead, it ran to baseball and real estate prices. This didn't interest me much. Over the first couple of years I did spend time with some of my older students – guys who had been in the military, or, in one case, working as a programmer for IBM. I went to a few parties, and in the case of the ex-IBM guy was introduced to the art of homemade furniture design and manufacture (he had the power tools). But that was about the extent of my work-related social life. The real action lay elsewhere.

As you may recall, ever since I left Vanderbilt, I had led a somewhat lonely existence, especially where female companionship was concerned. When I moved to San Diego, I came with the intention of getting on with my life, and now that I had a real job, the next step was to get a wife. Since I was under the impression that the most reliable source of suitable women was the church, I spent my first two and a half months in San Diego church-hopping around the local Church of Christ congregations, visiting about six of them in the process. I wasn't looking for theological compatibility, much less a place to work and grow (as churches were wont to advertise themselves), although I considered these to be desirable. I was looking for single women, preferably near my age and preferably good-looking. This search was utterly fruitless, so early in November, I paid a second visit to the La Mesa Church of Christ, having decided that it was no worse than the others and better than some. Unfortunately, that wasn't soon enough for anybody to invite me to Thanksgiving dinner, so for the first time in my life, I was alone on Thanksgiving. To make matters worse, I had neglected to shop on Wednesday and in those days stores were closed on Thanksgiving Day. All I had was a package of spaghetti and a stick of margarine, so my Thanksgiving feast consisted of a plate of buttered pasta. You might say it was the extreme low point of my social career!

Things clicked on this second visit to the La Mesa church. I met some people I felt comfortable with, and more importantly, I soon got wind of a single woman named Caryn, who was about my age, and said to be very good looking. This sounded like what I been looking for, so I immediately began scheming my plan of attack – without asking what the catch was. Pretty soon, I wound up in a cross between a soap opera and a Jane Austen novel: a little group of people near my age who were somehow involved with this person and with one another, and who were caught up in their own intrigues and gossip. I met her, but I soon started to find out what the catch was: she was having none of me; she preferred high school boys, and not the most mature ones, either. And there was a complicated back story, the truth of some parts of which I could never determine. Eventually – this was in early March – the current high school boy went away (he had joined the Marines) and I made a date with her, thinking (I guess) that my maturity, worldly prospects, and brilliant conversation would win the day. We had three dates over a period of three weeks, each less satisfactory than the one before, and one kiss (it was my idea, and my contemporary record of it states that it was "lousy"). After week three and a conversation at her house that lasted until 4:30 a.m., I had to admit that this was a lost cause.

Even though I knew that my original scheme was a lost cause, I couldn't bring myself to just walk away from Caryn. For one thing, she was part of what otherwise was my primary social circle; and for another, I was obsessed. When I had begun my campaign, I had been out of circulation for more than eight years and I had doubted my ability to initiate romantic relationships. To get to where I had, I had needed to overcome a lot of fear, anxiety, and inertia, and this process not only put me in touch with feelings I had forgotten but had also aroused my self-confidence and determination. I had started writing songs again, and the one I wrote in the aftermath of that third date was even pretty good, although hard on the voice. But now what? She had made it clear that she "wasn't interested in me in that way" but that we could be "just friends." And because I wasn't ready to totally give up my hopes, and because I wanted to think of myself as noble, magnanimous, and possibly self-sacrificing, I went along with it. That is to say, I let myself be used. I served as chauffeur, confidant, and audience for pointless conversations that went on into the wee hours of the morning, while she continued to pursue her private soap opera. There was another high school boy, even less suitable than the last.

This went on until June, when I left town for Northern California. I had been recruited to participate in a summer faculty fellowship program sponsored by NASA, Stanford University, and the American Society of Engineering Educators. This was supposed to be a multidisciplinary design exercise focused on airport access for the Bay Area, but nothing much got designed. It was a boondoggle, but I was getting paid for it. It was fun, mostly. It was sort of like being back in graduate school, but without the pressure of having to write a dissertation. While I was there, I started reflecting on my life situation. I realized that I had been fighting the idea that I might always be single. If God wanted me to be married, he sure wasn't doing much to bring it about. It finally came to me that what I should be asking was, "What can I do because I am single that I couldn't do if I were married?" And the answer came back that I could start a singles group at La Mesa.

Now, in those days, singles groups were an up-and-coming thing in the Churches of Christ, in part because single adults were often seen as outcasts. This was especially true of divorced people because the church had always maintained a strong stand against divorce. I had been made aware that there was some kind of singles group in the Churches of Christ that embraced all of Southern California, but I hadn't been interested – I regarded people who were involved in such things as losers, and I wasn't ready to admit that I was a loser – not yet, anyway. But now, I was beginning to have my doubts on that score. Furthermore, before I had left for the summer, I had experienced first-hand the condescending attitude of certain young married Christians toward their single brethren, especially in the remarks of a certain young married woman in a Sunday School class (whose marriage failed not long after – she'd been cheating on her husband). So we singles needed to organize to uphold our worth and dignity. I consulted some people at the church in Campbell, California that I was attending that summer and returned to San Diego with the determination to get something going.

When I got back, who should I run into but Gene Myers. I had originally encountered Gene when I was in Berkeley. He had visited the church there on occasion, and I seem to remember that he had even preached there a few times when we were between regular preachers. Gene was middle-aged, bald, chubby, single, and inclined to exaggerate the extent of our previous acquaintance. But it turned out that he was also interested in starting a singles group at La Mesa, so we agreed to join forces. It was a good fit – Gene was an extreme extravert to my extreme introvert, so he was a natural planner and leader of social events. We set up a four-person steering committee including of the two of us and set out to recruit members. The idea caught on quickly, and soon we had a collection of single people of all descriptions, ranging in age from kids just out of high school to senior citizens. With Gene at the helm, we mostly specialized in parties and outings, with a few devotionals thrown in. Working with this group had the effect of expanding my social contacts and providing an opportunity for me to interact with people in a less emotionally-charged atmosphere than had been the case the previous year.

Unfortunately, the other thing I did when I got back to San Diego was to fall back into the "just friends" routine. It had gotten to be habit, but it was getting really old. Finally, in May 1978, the big blow-up came. Caryn had dragged me off to a "miracle service" somewhere in El Cajon that featured somebody who called himself Pastor Denny. This event was being televised – I think on a routine basis – and it struck me as being a masterpiece of cheap showmanship. People were getting healed! People were getting "slain in the spirit" left and right! The crowd was being exhorted (repeatedly) to "expect a miracle!" I don't remember who all else was with us, but I know that one of the high school boys was (the even less suitable one) and he went forward to be healed. My reaction to the whole thing was disgust – I thought that it was totally phony, and I sat there feeling more and more hostile as time went on. Finally it was over, and I took Caryn home. I don't remember what, if anything, I said to her at the time, but it was definitely over – I was disenchanted. I went home and wrote an angry song, the crowning line of which is "Sometimes I think nobody's been to where you're coming from!" It's a pretty good song – I still sing it.

While all this was going on, big things were moving on another front – but slowly. Sometime during the winter – I think it was probably February – Gene announced that there was to be a leadership conference for singles groups from the Churches of Christ in Southern California that would take place in Santa Ana. His idea was that the four of us on the steering committee should attend. I wasn't too thrilled about it – I figured it was a waste of a perfectly good Saturday – but I went anyway. When I got there, I naturally scanned the attendees for interesting young women. I wasn't too impressed with what I saw, but I did take the trouble to make the acquaintance of the one I considered the best of the lot, and made sure that when they had a circle prayer, I was standing next to her so I could hold her hand. She told me that her name was Ellen Kramar, that she was from Riverside, and that she worked in a hospital. She didn't say what she did in the hospital, and I didn't ask. On the other hand, I did tell her that I was an Assistant Professor of Civil Engineering at San Diego State.

I won't say I didn't think anything of this encounter, because I did, but I certainly didn't do anything about it. Nothing happened for several months. But then my friend Ron Storm – one of my original La Mesa social circle – went to the wedding of a friend of his in the Riverside area. He came back and told me he had met a lady doctor there who had asked about me – her name was Ellen Kramar and she said she had met me in Santa Ana. The part about her being a doctor was news to me – she later told me that she was in the habit of keeping it quiet because it tended to scare guys off. It had the opposite effect on me – after all, I was a doctor myself, although of the philosophical variety, not the medical kind. Somebody who had accomplished something with her life would be a refreshing change after Caryn, who was living at home unemployed and still trying to figure out what she wanted to do at age twenty-eight. My reaction to Ron's news was enough to let him know that I was indeed interested in her. And indeed I was: I even went so far as to try to look her up in the Riverside phone directory. The best I could come up with, though, was an E. Kramar, and I didn't try to call.

Meanwhile, I was getting tired of being good where women were concerned. I was tired of being single, yes, but if the opportunity presented itself, I was not averse to having a little non-serious fun. The summer of 1978 came, and pretty soon, an opportunity did present itself. It turned out that Ron also had a lost cause, and she started visiting church at La Mesa. Her name was Cindy, last name long forgotten, and she was definitely good-looking – she was the petite, cute, and vivacious type as opposed to the placid beauty and outward calm of Caryn. His problem with her was that she preferred his rivals – although I don't think they were as thoroughly unsatisfactory as high school boys. He also expressed contempt for her intelligence; she had, he said, the "intellect of a ping-pong ball." So naturally, I undertook to tease him by giving him a pack of ping-pong balls as a graduation present (when he finally graduated from San Diego State) so he would have to try to explain their significance to her. I also took her out to lunch one Sunday to see what my possibilities were in that quarter. It soon became apparent that there weren't any beyond lunch conversations. She knew I wrote songs, and at some point she asked me if I had written any Christian rock songs. I said I hadn't, and she asked why I didn't. When lunch was over, I took her back to her apartment complex, where her stated intention was to lie around the swimming pool, and I went home and wrote one of my very best songs: the first verse sketched a swimming pool and a frivolous girl, the second the futile and transitory nature of lives and fortunes (I had been reading Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*), and the third the ping-pong game of life; and in contrast to this, the refrain declared that "Jesus my Lord is rock steady all the time." It was as close as I could come to Christian rock.

It is hard to realize, in these days of social media and overwhelming busyness, just how central a church like the one at La Mesa could be in the social life of young adults. In addition to standing around and talking before and after church – which tradition decreed should take place three times a week: Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday night – there was a variety of discussion and Bible-study groups, both formally-sponsored and spontaneous, as well as more socially-oriented groups like the singles group and church-wide social events. That summer Ron and I were part of a spontaneously-formed Bible study group that met once a week in the apartment of one of the young married couples. One of the members of this group was a recent college graduate named Linda Westmoreland. Sometime around the middle of the summer or a little after, Ron remarked to me that she was the only girl he knew who "didn't have her head screwed on sideways." I don't think he knew he was hooked at that point, but I did. Things went pretty fast from there: they were married around Christmastime and Ron, who was part of a two-man group that sometimes did music for weddings, pulled off the heroic feat of playing and singing at his own wedding.

I mentioned a while back that one of my students had introduced me to the art of homemade furniture design and manufacture. When I had gotten back from Northern California the previous fall, I had rented an unfurnished apartment that had a very long living room, and I decided that what it needed was a room divider to turn it into a more manageable space. So I designed an elaborate piece of furniture that consisted of a bookcase with an overhead beam for hanging lights and houseplants. That summer I had gone out and bought a bunch of Philippine mahogany, and gone to work on it with borrowed power tools in a friend's garage. One Friday afternoon sometime about the beginning of August, I was working on sanding it, all sweaty and covered with sawdust, when Ron Storm called. He told me that his family was having a going away party at an uncle's house up in the Riverside area for his brother, who was leaving for graduate school at Baylor University, and asked if I'd like to go. I said, "Why would I want to do that?" He said, "Ellen Kramar will be there." I've never known how he knew that. As it turned out, his cousin was Ellen's roommate and Ellen was coming with her, but I never knew who told Ron, or why. I always figured he asked me to go to get a ride – I had a nearly new car, and his was a little doubtful for a trip of that length – but if so, he baited his hook well. So I said yes and went home to get cleaned up.

It had been quite a while since I had seen Ellen and I really didn't remember what she looked like, but when I walked into the room, I was able to pick her out by a process of elimination. I don't remember much about what happened at the party, except that I must have talked to her some, and towards the end of the evening we went out for a walk and talked some more. Actually, I was doing most of the talking, going on and on about some work-related thing, lecturing her on transportation engineering as if she had been one of my students. She seemed fascinated by all this. She later told me that actually she had been practicing her listening skills, but for the moment I was fooled. I did learn that she was a resident physician in Family Practice at Riverside General Hospital, was living in housing provided by the hospital, and was from a missionary family and had lived in Peru as a teenager. In the course of our conversation somebody – most likely me – suggested that our respective singles groups get together for a visit to the San Diego Zoo. We agreed that this was a good idea, and set a date for about three weeks later. My motive for this scheme was that I wanted to get together with her again without sacrificing my cool by being too direct about it. But after I got back to San Diego, I decided that I didn't want to wait three weeks to see her.

So what I did was drive up to Riverside on Sunday afternoon a week later. I suppose I must have called ahead and warned her I was coming, but when I got there, my opening line was, "Well, I can't say that I just happened to be in the neighborhood and decided to stop by." I had brought my guitar and I sang a bunch of songs, including three that had come out of my lost-cause experience – the two I have already mentioned plus one more that was relatively upbeat and encouraging. I didn't think all that much of that song myself, but Ellen has always liked it, so I still sing it sometimes. It turned out that music was the right approach: it let her see my emotional side, which is something I don't often reveal in ordinary conversation. Later on, we went to evening services at the church she was attending, and sometime about then, maybe when we were going over there or when we were coming back, she started telling me in considerable detail why she wasn't going to get married – it had to do with a complicated plan in which she and some other doctors she had known in college or medical school were going to start a health maintenance organization in the Atlanta area and use the profits to bankroll missionary efforts. I wondered why she was telling me all this, since I hadn't said anything about marriage. Then, as I was leaving, she kissed me. I mean, she *really* kissed me. I don't know how she would have described that kiss, but it struck me as being downright passionate. There couldn't have been a greater contrast between it and the one I gave Caryn. So I went on my way rejoicing, but more than a little confused. Could this be the real thing?

Well, I went home and wrote a song about it. It started with:

This song is my gift to you, the first one I gave –
A simple little souvenir that I wanted you to have.
The first time you kissed me, well, it took me by surprise;
I didn't know you felt that way, but the feeling's on the rise!

And it ended with:

We're like two twigs upon a flood, two leaves upon the wind:
The love that sweeps our lives along will keep us to the end.

I had a feeling that there was something inevitable about all this – like we were indeed being swept along – but there was a barrier. This time it wasn't a human rival but rather a set plan or, as she might have put it, a dream. We saw each other several times: the zoo trip came off and then we made several trips back and forth. The general routine was that I would go up to Riverside one weekend and she would come down to San Diego the next. Finally, sometime in September, she went to visit her family in the Imperial Valley and I went along to meet them.

This was my introduction to the Imperial Valley. At the time, Ellen's parents were living on the Kramar ancestral property a few miles west of El Centro. Her late grandfather had operated the place as a dairy farm, but since his death the cows had been disposed of and most of the land had been rented out. The part that hadn't been included the old farmhouse, which had been built from wood salvaged from a pioneer school, a smaller house occupied by Ellen's Uncle Bill, another smaller house occupied by her grandmother, a trailer occupied by Ellen's sister Cindy and her husband John Bibee, and across the freeway, a house occupied by her Aunt Beth and Uncle Noel Kirby. The old farmhouse was surrounded by a grove of eucalyptus trees and other vegetation, and across the road, there was an irrigation ditch. The valley that surrounded it was flat, hot in the daytime, and humid from the extensive irrigation; and it smelled of manure, smoke, pesticides, and fertilizer. I'm not sure how much of that I noticed at the time, though.

The experience of meeting Ellen's family was an overwhelming one. She was the oldest of eight children, six girls and two boys. Two of her sisters were married and living in the vicinity – Cindy, already mentioned and Doris, who was married to Jim Shewmaker and living elsewhere in the Imperial Valley. A third sister, Julie, was married to Manuel Magos and living in Tuscon. Of the two remaining sisters, Lois was teaching school in Santa Barbara and Rebecca, the youngest, was in college in Texas. Her brothers, John and Stephen, were still in school and living at home. In addition to the immediate family, there were aunts and uncles and who knew how many cousins. So when I stepped into the house to be introduced, there were all these people! How was I to keep them straight? I'm sure there were more staying at the house than I've listed: for one thing, the unmarried guys all slept upstairs in an open loft space, and I know there were more of us that just me and Ellen's brothers – but I have no idea who else might have been there.

While I was trying to assimilate all this, I still had my suit to press with Ellen. By this time, I had written another song – a sort of carpe diem thing with the refrain "I want to love you one day at a time." It was, of course, part of my campaign against the pre-planned life that didn't include me, and it included these lines:

The secret's this: that nothing is forever but right now.
We dream our dreams but dreams, it seems, can't love us anyhow.

Of course, I was pressing my case verbally as well as musically. Saturday night (it must have been) Ellen and I went across the road and sat on the canal bank so we could have a little privacy. And in the course of this conversation, I accidentally proposed to her. I say accidentally, because I had no intention of doing any such thing when I crossed to road to go sit on the canal bank; it just somehow slipped out in the conversation. The way it came about was this: I was arguing against the Atlanta idea and I said I would like her to consider some alternatives – like us getting married. And then I thought, "Did I just say what I think I did?" At the time, she didn't give me an answer one way or the other.

In fact, she didn't give me an answer for another three months, and when she did, it was as casual as my proposal had been. We continued visiting back and forth and writing letters in between. Finally, one time when we were together in December, Ellen – as ever, the planner and organizer – was making out her personal plan for the coming year. And in the process, she asked me, "Well, when's the wedding going to be?" And I said, "Oh – does that mean we *are* getting married?" We spent Christmas with her family in the Valley and announced our engagement to them. Then I called my parents and told them. The wedding was to be as soon as possible after Ellen finished her residency at the end of June; originally, we said July 7, but she had a Family Practice Board Exam that day, so we put it off to July 14.

Meanwhile, things went on much as they had been, with letters and weekly visits back and forth. We collaborated on a song celebrating the relationship. It began

Somehow things work out all right in the end –
Something moves our lives as they begin to blend.

And the refrain went

And I'm grateful; yes, I'm thankful 'cause of you!

I wrote the first two verses, and Ellen wrote the third.

In March, I got my introduction to the Salton Sea and Anza Borrego Desert State Park. Ellen and I, her parents, and the Bibees drove up to the west shore of the Salton Sea for a picnic. The menu was carne asada, and the meat was the final remains of the last of her grandfather's cows. I suppose in a way it was a sad occasion, but it didn't affect me much since I hadn't been personally acquainted with the beast. The meat was pretty tough, as I remember it. After the picnic, the younger generation headed west into the state park for a camping trip. We pitched our tents in the Yaqui Flat Primitive Campground and – and the fact is I don't remember much more about that trip. I suppose we may have gone up to the park headquarters in Borrego Springs and hiked up to the first big palm grove in Borrego Palm Canyon but, if so, I have no distinct recollection of it.

Then in May, with the wedding planned, the invitations out, and the jacarandas in bloom, disaster struck. Ellen got cold feet. She came down to San Diego one weekend, and it was obvious that she was upset. She was dropping things in the kitchen. She said she wasn't sure we should get married and that she thought she'd go to Guatemala for a year after she finished residency, and then we'd see. I was appalled. By now I was thirty-three, and the project of getting on with my life was stalled again. Not to mention it was embarrassing to have to call the wedding off this late in the game. I was angry, I was hurt, and I spent a miserable week after she went back home. But I soon came to the conclusion that if she was determined not to go through with it, there was nothing I could do about it – to try to argue her out of it would just make matters worse. I accepted that she could call the wedding off if she wanted to, and that she was probably going to, and I resigned myself to the loss. All I could do was to try to respond to her specific concerns. The next weekend I went up to Riverside for the decisive confrontation. We went to visit Wilbur Storm, another of Ron's uncles, whom we had asked to officiate at the wedding, and asked for his counsel. Somehow, between what he said, and what I said, we were able to satisfy Ellen that going ahead with the wedding was the right thing to do. Whew! What a relief. We went back to preparing for the big day. We had written our own vows, and were going to memorize them and recite them without notes. That was almost as heroic as singing at your own wedding, and we had a lot of memorizing to do, besides working out all sorts of details about the ceremony and the reception.

In June came our last big outing with the La Mesa singles group, and my introduction to the Lagunas. This was a camping trip to the Forest Service's Burnt Rancheria Campground across the Sunrise Highway from the village of Mount Laguna. Burnt Rancheria is supposed to be for individual camping, not group camping, but Gene simply took over a trailhead with a large parking lot and a few picnic tables in the vicinity. How he worked this out with the Forest Service, how much they charged him for this unauthorized camping, and how he avoided being carted off to jail by the rangers for it, I don't know, but a good time was had by all (more or less). Otherwise, June and the first half of July were taken up with wedding preparations.

Finally, the day came. I stood there in my navy blue tuxedo (this sort of thing was the fashion in the 1970s – it could have been worse – lime green, for instance) and Ellen walked down the aisle in her homemade wedding dress (at least, I guess it was homemade) decorated by a sari. Wilbur Storm presided, Ron and his buddy Shannon did the music, Ellen's sister Lois was the maid of honor, and Jerry Yost, a friend from my Berkeley days, was the best man. We got through our self-written vows with only minor mistakes, and then it was all over and time for the reception. But wait – first the photographer had to take some pictures! I got the impression that the idea here was that the reason people had weddings was so somebody could photograph them – the event itself was incidental. Finally all that got over with, and we got to go mingle with our guests and do the usual wedding reception rituals – minus the cake-in-the-face one, thankfully. Life was simpler (and cheaper) in those days: the reception was held in the church basement, there was no dinner, no dancing, and no limos – just a cake, some non-alcoholic punch, and some candy and nuts. We even managed to avoid getting the get-away car "decorated" – we hid my car at the motel the Yosts were staying at.

We drove up to the Olympic National Park for the honeymoon, first stop, Santa Barbara. I had written one last song, which I debuted on our honeymoon. It had been written in pieces over a period of several months. The first verse, written before the May crisis, looked back to my lost-cause days and maintained that my current flourishing state was due to Ellen's presence; the second verse and the bridge reflected the crisis; and the last verse looked to the future, but tied back into the ending of the first song I had written after I met her:

> *O lady, you know that our stream's running true;*
> *So lady, let's go to where our wind blows us to*
> *Through the night.*

After two weeks, we came back to San Diego to discover that, although they had missed the getaway car, certain of our friends had “decorated” our apartment. The worst thing they did was to turn off the valve on the water supply line to the toilet. After that, the priority items were to get Ellen a decent car – you had to double-clutch her old one to shift the gears, and it made various alarming sounds – and a job. The job turned out to be no particular problem, and she was soon at work as a Primary Care Physician for Kaiser-Permanente at their La Mesa medical offices. We disposed of the old car (gave it away, probably) and bought a used station wagon.

Our wedding started a small flurry of them amongst the Kramars. Ellen’s sister Rebecca was already engaged to Tim Brindley, but they weren’t the next to go. Lois moved to Pasadena to attend Fuller Theological Seminary and met a German student named Martin Wollen there. Their courtship went really fast: by Christmas, they were married – taking advantage of the fact that the church was already decorated! In April, 1980, Tim and Becky were married and shortly thereafter, Ellen’s parents moved back to Peru to resume their missionary career. By December 1983, John and Steve were also married – John to Connie and Steve to Joyce. Thus ended the first chapter of my social life in San Diego. I was now connected to a large extended family that I have always deeply appreciated; but on the other hand, my marriage and other people’s moves out of the area slowly cut off many of my ties with the people I had hung out with when I was single.

Back to Nature

My courtship of Ellen and my involvement with the La Mesa singles group had not only changed my social life but also introduced me to much of San Diego’s hinterland. My relationship with the back country didn’t stop there, of course; rather it has continued to develop ever since.

From the beginning, the Cuyamacas were my first love – a somewhat tragic one, as it turned out. Over the years, I went there many times, exploring most parts of the state park. Climbing Mount Cuyamaca (South Peak) around the end of October or the beginning of November became an annual ritual. I’ve only missed two years – 1977, because the habit had not yet been formed – and 2003. Meanwhile, I also climbed the peak at other times at different times and went on solo or group hikes to other parts of the park: Stonewall Peak, Upper Green Valley, the trail from Descanso to the Green Valley campground, Lake Cuyamaca, East Mesa, and Middle Peak. I bought a copy of Jeremy Shad’s *Afoot and Afield in San Diego* and followed trails elsewhere in the mountains – but the Cuyamacas were the closest and best place. I wore out boots and learned to carry water and use sunscreen. This lasted throughout the 1980s and up into the 1990s – but then things changed. In the spring of 1994, I bought a good – and rather expensive – pair of hiking boots. But before I could put them to use, Ellen suffered a serious health problem and wound up in the hospital for several days. After that, I was distracted from hiking for much of the summer. Then, a few months later, there were a couple of well-publicized mountain lion attacks in the Cuyamacas, including one fatality, and the official word went out that it was unsafe to hike alone in lion country. This put a serious damper on my hiking, since I took the warning seriously, and it’s not that easy to find people who want to go hiking when you do. But the annual Cuyamaca climb continued in spite of all this.

Then came October 2003. We had thought about climbing Cuyamaca the last Saturday in October, but my son was in his high school band and that night was their homecoming game. I suppose we might have gotten the hike in and made it back in time, but it would have been rushed and he would have been tired. So we decided to go the next Saturday. October 26, the day of the homecoming game, was a hot one. Not only was it hot, but a strong Santa Ana wind was blowing off the deserts. When I looked out on Sunday morning, my first thought was that it had clouded over during the night, but I soon realized that what I was seeing was smoke. Sometime around 4:00 the previous afternoon a hunter who had gotten lost started a signal fire somewhere near where Cedar Creek joined the San Diego River in the midst of a large tract of brush that stretches from Ramona to the Cuyamacas. The fire got away and nobody succeeded in squelching it while it was still small. Around midnight, it burst out of the San Diego River Canyon and began to spread rapidly west and south with the wind behind it. It jumped Highway 67 on the east side of Poway and then, by noon, Interstate 15 in the vicinity of the Miramar Marine Air Station. By midafternoon, it had reached Interstate 805 on the other side of Miramar, and there it stopped, having run out of brush. Meanwhile, it had spread south through Alpine and across Interstate 8 to burn houses in the communities of Harbison Canyon and Crest and then those on Shadow Mountain at the east edge of El Cajon.

Late in the afternoon, the fire that had burned across Miramar was heading south into Tierrasanta and Mission Trails Regional Park, reaching the San Diego River near the intersection of Mission Gorge Road and Jackson Drive. At this point an evacuation was ordered for the neighborhoods up the hill south of Mission Gorge Road, and our Neighborhood Watch leaders started talking about evacuating our area, although it was several miles away from the fire. I didn't take this talk very seriously, though, because I knew that wildfires rarely travel far once they get into residential neighborhoods with irrigated landscaping and lots of fire hydrants. In addition to this so-called Cedar Fire, two more major fires had sprung up Saturday night, one in the Valley Center area to the north and another east of the Otay Lakes near the Mexican Border. In town, the air quality was bad, with ashes falling like snow, and everybody was on edge. Through all this and during the next day, which brought more of the same, I consoled myself with the thought that at least the Cuyamacas were safe, since they were upwind of the fire.

But the next day, the wind came around, and the backside of the fire, which had been neglected up to that point, began to spread east and north. There was no stopping it then: it burned all the way across Cuyamaca State Park and spread towards Julian. The firefighters made a "heroic" stand around the historic district in Julian and managed to save it, but many houses in the residential areas surrounding the town were burned. Finally, late in the week, the fire ran out of fuel and was brought under control. In the park, almost all of the conifer forest was destroyed. A few incense cedars survived, and many of the oaks either survived or re-sprouted from their roots; however, the giant live oaks along the bottom of the valley and the big sugar pines on Middle Peak were gone. A few areas along Highway 79 around the Green Valley and Paseo Pacacho campgrounds were saved, and strangely, there was a belt of big timber near the ridgeline on South Peak that was untouched. But elsewhere, it was all gone. At first, it looked like some of the pines were only scorched, but they all died anyway.

I was grief-stricken at what had been lost. It was tragic that a number of lives had been lost and it was sad about the burned houses, but the houses were insured and most of them were replaced within two or three years. But the Cuyamacas I knew are gone for far longer than my lifetime. At best, they will be back to what they were in a century or two, but with climate change, they probably never will be. At first, we were reassured by the experts that fires are natural and that the burned areas would reseed themselves. But this fire was too hot: it destroyed too much of the seedbed, and the conifers did not reseed. In the years that followed, there was a campaign to plant pine seedlings, and now they are beginning to sprout up, but they are still few and far between; instead, much of the area is now occupied by brush. We still climb Mount Cuyamaca every fall, and we watch the slow recovery, but the glory that did so much to change my impression of the San Diego area has departed forever.

As much as I loved the Cuyamacas, I have spent even more time in the Laguna National Recreation Area of the Cleveland National Forest. The Laguna Mountains are actually a high plateau ending, on the east, in a steep escarpment down to the desert. Most of the highest points in the area, which are a little above 6,000 feet in elevation, are along the edge of the escarpment, although one of them, Wooded Hill, is a little farther west. A piece of the Pacific Crest Trail runs through the area, mostly along the edge of the escarpment. The major feature of the plateau itself is a large meadow with numerous branches. Within the meadow, which is used to graze cattle under an arrangement predating the creation of the National Forest, are three lakes or ponds: Big Laguna, Little Laguna, and Water of the Woods – these are the reason the area is called the Laguna Mountains. Little Laguna is intermittent and goes dry by mid-summer most years, but the other two have water in them except during severe and extended droughts. The drainage from the meadow is concentrated at Water of the Woods and from there flows steeply down into Noble Canyon, which runs along the west side of the plateau. To the south, the land gradually drops down to the route of Interstate 8 around Buckman Springs. On the east side, between the meadow and the escarpment, there is a strip of oak-pine woods; also, within the meadow, there are "islands" of woodland. The Lagunas, being farther east than the Cuyamacas, are somewhat dryer but they do get snow in the winter and, in addition to the usual winter rains, summer thunderstorms that form out over the desert.

I have already described how I was introduced to the Lagunas as a result of a church camping trip in June 1979. The next time I was there was in August of that year; Ellen's family was camping at the El Prado group campground. After her parents went back to Peru, Ellen took over the management of this camping enterprise, and it became something of a family tradition. In addition to members of her rather large extended family, this "Kramar Camp," as it was called, involved various friends and hangers-on, some on a regular basis. It didn't always happen in the Lagunas, but the El Prado and Horse Heaven campgrounds there were the most common venues. As an institution, it grew and flourished through the 1980s, peaking in terms of attendance around 1990. Thereafter, it declined as siblings moved off to various parts of the world, children grew up, and people got generally busier.

Over time, this camping experience developed a distinct set of traditions. The proper location, of course, was one of the Forest Service campgrounds bordering the Laguna Meadow or one of its branches. These campgrounds were equipped with wood stoves made out of steel, and with metal chimneys. These stoves could be fed with small pieces of wood – sticks and small branches – that were scrounged from around the campsite (the Forest Service let you do this), so the heat could be controlled pretty well; they were a little bit hazardous, though – somebody got burned pretty badly on a chimney one year. The restrooms consisted of pit toilets; it wasn't a proper Kramar Camp without their aroma. There were no showers – you were expected to get dirty and enjoy it, itching and all. There was a metal fire ring, and each night there was a campfire. On one of the nights each year, there was a so-called talent show, featuring so-called talent – such as Uncle Jim (that's me) playing his guitar and singing his original songs, John and Steve (my wife's brothers) doing their corny duets, and various groups of kids acting out silly skits. One year, we even did a dramatization of *Horton Hatches an Egg* – as best I remember, I was Horton and had to pretend to be sitting on an egg the whole time. The campfire in the fire ring was kept going throughout the day, fed by big pieces of wood – mostly dead branches – that had been scavenged locally, and cut up with an axe or saw by half-grown boys who thought this was a very manly thing to do. Despite appearances, I don't remember anybody ever getting hurt doing this. The fire would die down overnight, so an essential part of the morning ritual would be for some early riser to blow on the coals and get a flame started. Another essential feature was a rope swing tied to two adjacent pine trees and hung by Rick Carnes (a non-Kramar regular) and Jim Shewmaker.

Ellen is the sort of person who believes in planning and organization, so when she took over the management of the camping trips, she proceeded to plan and organize them – a schedule of events (Saturday morning hike, Saturday night talent show, Sunday morning worship, etc.) and a duty roster (who was supposed to cook when, who was supposed to wash the dishes, etc.) My idea of camping, on the other hand, was to go to the woods and commune with the trees. What that meant was that I would slip away from the social whirl and go out on my own. This would happen early in the morning – contrary to my habits when at home, I would get up as soon as it was light and go wander around before breakfast – or, usually, on Sunday afternoon. In the course of these walks by myself, I explored most of the area around the campgrounds. This included the Laguna Meadow, the piece of the Pacific Crest Trail that ran along the edge of the escarpment above the desert, and various trails connecting the two. On other visits (not connected with the annual camp) I climbed Wooded Hill, and much later, explored the stretch of Agua Dulce Creek that runs from the Wooded Hill area down to the meadow.

I walk out to the meadow and I wade into the grass;
The cows and pines are still the same, but I know the time has passed
When we were all together and the children still were small,
But every rock and path and pond can still remember all.
And the campgrounds all are haunted by the ghosts of who we've been,
The sun-shot shades of summer days that cannot come again.

And so those days are gone, and we don't go camping every summer anymore. But the Lagunas are still a special place.

Of the readily accessible mountain areas around San Diego, I have spent the least amount of time on Mount Palomar and its ridge. Palomar, of course, is the site of the world-famous astronomical observatory; otherwise, although somewhat lower than some of the other major ridges, it is wetter and is covered with a forest similar to that on the highest part of the Cuyamacas, except that the biggest trees are big-cone Douglas firs instead of sugar pines. I have camped there four or five times and have hiked not only in the state park there but also on some of the longer trails on the northeast side of the ridge. At various times, I have climbed up to High Point on Palomar proper and to Agua Tibia Mountain and Eagle Crag farther north. The most heroic of these hikes were the ones to Eagle Crag, one of them a solo hike in the mid-1980s and the other with my son James in 2004. Both started from the Dripping Springs campground off of Highway 79 between Warner Springs and Temecula. At the time I made the first of these hikes, the area had not burned for more than a century and the Dripping Springs Trail that led up Agua Tibia Mountain from the campground switch-backed up through giant chaparral that stood twenty feet high or more. The heroic part (other than the total distance, which is more than twenty miles) was the fact that I had only brought one small canteen of water and ran out about halfway through the hike. I was very thirsty by the time I got back to the campground, but I made it. The second time, I forgot our lunches but decided to go ahead anyway. This time we were very hungry by the time we got back to the campground, and the hike took longer than I had remembered. It was also a sign that I was getting old: at the end, my sixteen-year-old son was striding along a fast as ever, and I was stumbling along behind, trying to keep up. So passes the pride of the mighty!

I have already described my introduction to the Anza Borrego Desert area. I have been there quite a few times since. On our earlier visits, we tended to camp at Yaqui Flat; other typical features included hanging around the visitors' center in Borrego Springs and hiking to the palm grove in the Palm Canyon. Until I retired, these visits generally took place during Spring Break, which for many years was the week before Easter, for both San Diego State and the local public schools. Some years, if it had rained enough, there would be wildflower displays, and if we were lucky, they would correspond to the school vacations. Of course, the downside to that was that it would guarantee that the place would be crowded. One year, it was so crowded that there was no space at Yaqui Flat and when we inquired at the visitors' center, we were told that we might try Blair Valley, which is off of county road S-2 south of Highway 78. You might say that Yaqui Flat was a semi-primitive campground, since it had port-a-potties, and that Blair Valley was a full-fledged primitive campground, since you were expected to bring your own spade and dig a hole. Thereafter, we more-or-less abandoned Yaqui Flat for Blair Valley, camping there on a couple of later occasions. Over the years, I made it into several other odd corners of the desert: the palm groves around Mountain Palm Springs, Starfish Cove and Alma Wash, the ruins of the Marshall South cabin, the pictographs in the Blair Valley area, and even the summit of Whale Peak, on a reprise of the Eagle Crag he-man hike with James a year later – on the way back from which I found out that it is true that if you let yourself get dehydrated, your muscles will cramp. We even went upscale and stayed at the Casa del Zorro resort a couple of times, courtesy of Ellen's work. Since I have retired, Anza Borrego has been included in winter birding trips to the desert and the Imperial Valley, with Yaqui Well and the mesquite bosque in Borrego Valley being typical places to look for desert birds.

Finally, there is the Imperial Valley. Over the years, I have spent quite a bit of time there. Not long after Ellen's parents left to go back to Peru, the Magos family moved from Tucson to El Centro, and we visited them quite a bit when our children were young. Later, the Magoses moved to Escondido, but Ellen's parents returned to the States and settled for a while in Brawley, and we visited there. In between and afterwards, Ellen had (at different times) various uncles, aunts, and cousins living there. Besides the heat and the huge, flat fields, the features of the Valley that have impressed me the most are the richness of the bird life and the Hispanic-flavored rural culture.

Flocks of egrets and ibises, with an occasional curlew, forage in the irrigated fields; flocks of blackbirds – and, in the winter, geese – feed in the fallow fields; and there are all kinds of doves – mourning, ground, white-winged, Eurasian collared – in the fields and towns and in the clumps of eucalyptus and tamarisk trees around the farmhouses.

At the time I first became acquainted with the Imperial Valley, the inhabitants were split about evenly between the descendants of the Midwestern pioneers and immigrant Mexican farmworkers – but neither group had been there all that long, since the area was not settled until the early 1900s. As time has gone on, more and more of the pioneer families have sold out and agribusiness has moved in. Still, the local culture remains a blend of Midwestern sobriety and Latin extravagance: people tend to work hard and mind their own business, but the Christmas light displays in the residential neighborhoods are spectacular and the locals claim that they invented carne asada.

Then, of course, there is the Salton Sea. For the most part, my experience of it has been the result of birding trips. These started as excursions during visits with Ellen's relatives and have continued as short visits in more recent years; I try to get down there a couple of times each winter. Despite the shrinkage of the Salton Sea and the degradation of its environment, birdlife is still abundant in areas close to the shore managed by the Sonny Bono National Wildlife Refuge. Still the Sea itself is dying and it doesn't look like anybody is going to revive it. It's too bad.

Changing Times in the Two San Diegos

Ever since I came to San Diego, I have lived on the wrong side of town. The famous San Diego – tourist San Diego, the San Diego of picture postcards, travel magazines, and vacation ads – occupies a narrow strip of land along the coast stretching west and north from downtown: west to include Coronado and then north through Pacific Beach, La Jolla, and the beach communities as far as Carlsbad. For the most part, Oceanside isn't included. In this area are downtown itself, Balboa Park and the zoo, Coronado and the Hotel del Coronado, Point Loma and the Cabrillo National Monument, Mission Bay and Sea World, La Jolla, the Torrey Pines Mesa with its famous golf course and the State Reserve, Del Mar, Encinitas, Rancho Santa Fe, and the coastal portions of Carlsbad. This is the land of big hotels, fancy restaurants, nightclubs, marinas, tourist attractions, and – in places – spectacular scenery. For the most part, it is also the land of wealthy neighborhoods and upscale retail establishments, although there are a few other enclaves of expensive housing scattered about elsewhere. The only major tourist attraction outside this area is the Safari Park in the San Pasqual Valley just east of Escondido. Otherwise, the travel magazines tend to skip over everything between the coast and the mountains to the east and Tijuana to the south (if they get that far).

What we might call the Other San Diego is a much more ordinary, everyday sort of place. It consists for the most part of mesas covered with tract houses and cheap-looking garden apartments. It has no real tourist attractions, although it does have some interesting areas and quirky landmarks, like the East San Diego Tower (occupied by the Tower Bar) on University Avenue or the seven stairs of

Rolando. It is inhabited, for the most part, by poor or middle-class people with a scattering of wealthier professionals or business owners. In places, it is a land of street gangs and sporadic violence. Most strikingly, however, it is today what we might call Ethnic San Diego: over the past fifty years, it has absorbed wave after wave of immigrants, many of them refugees. In addition to the ubiquitous Mexicans and Central Americans, there are Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, Chinese, Koreans, Somalis, Sudanese, Iraqis, Iranians, Lebanese, and dozens of other nationalities. Report has it (or did a few years ago) that there are over one hundred languages spoken in the homes of children attending public schools in City Heights, the neighborhood just to the west of where I live. The fancy restaurants may be in the coastal tourist strip, but the more interesting ones are apt to be in Kearny Mesa or East San Diego.

San Diego has changed a great deal since I first came here. For one thing, it has experienced sustained population growth. The effects of that are mixed: it is a far more sophisticated place now, but it is also more crowded, and the growth continues to invade the surrounding open space that makes it such an attractive place to live. When I came to San Diego, it had something of a small-town atmosphere. It was politically conservative but "laid back" – sort of a cross between a lazy beach town and a military base. The economy was heavily dependent on the Navy and the aerospace industry, which in turn was dependent on defense contracts. The presence of large numbers of retired Navy personnel and economic dependence on the military ensured its conservative political outlook; the climate and the tourist industry ensured the laid-back atmosphere. The dress code was casual – I soon discovered that the three-piece suits that I had acquired my last year in Berkeley were out of place; people on the street would ask me if I was a banker, since they were the only people expected to dress up for work. Most guys looked like slobs and were proud of it. That hasn't changed much, although we did survive the gold-chain-and-chest-hair era of the 1980s.

The lack of elegance extends to the local architecture. Although occasionally eccentric, it is rarely either very striking or very original. Historically, the signature style has been mission revival – Spanish/Moorish-influenced forms featuring arches, red-tile roofs, and stucco. But as in any large city, there are many different styles all mixed together: Victorian, craftsman, art deco, ranch, mid-century modern – you name it. The local architects try – they give themselves prizes for good work ("orchids") and booby prizes for bad ("onions") – but I have always had a hard time telling the difference. Where there is an overall ambience that seems really pleasant, it is usually the result of the scenery and/or the landscaping.

Over the forty-plus years I have been here, probably the most profound changes have resulted from population growth per se, immigration, and a shift in the economic base from defense industry to high technology. Where the region was once provincial it is now cosmopolitan; where it was once politically conservative it is now somewhere in between liberal and conservative; and where it was once dependent on defense industry, it is now oriented more toward wireless communications, information processing, and biotechnology. McDonald-Douglas left town; now it is Qualcomm that rules. When I first came here, the only kinds of restaurants that seemed beyond the ordinary were seafood and Mexican places; now there are all sorts of good ethnic restaurants and quite a few more-eclectic places featuring name-brand chefs. In the 1970s, downtown San Diego was pretty much dead – about all that was there was City Hall, the Federal and County Courthouses, one or two local department stores(most of whose business had already migrated to the suburban shopping malls), some banks, massage parlors, tattoo shops, bars catering to sailors, and the bus and rail stations. Any permanent residents were probably derelicts. Since that time there have been successive building booms in the downtown area, enthusiastically supported by the local economic establishment, and now we have expensive high-rise condominiums, a convention center, a baseball stadium, expensive tourist hotels, and a lot more skyscrapers. The high-rises don't rise as high as in some places, however, because building heights are limited by the proximity of the airport – but even as matters now stand, arriving air passengers get the thrill of seeing the tops of buildings at eye-level during final approach.

The military is still here, although its relative importance has been somewhat diminished by the overall population and economic growth. There was a moment, during the military drawdown that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, when things might have turned out somewhat differently. One of the problems posed by the military's presence has always been that it seized a great deal of what is now prime land during World Wars I and II. Some of the resulting installations had been abandoned prior to my arrival here and had been put to various uses: for instance, the University of California San Diego's campus, the Tierrasanta neighborhood, and parts of Mission Trails Regional Park. Otherwise, however, the Navy was unwilling to give up any land it acquired in times of national emergency, refusing, for instance, to move the Naval Hospital out of Balboa Park when it came time to rebuild and expand it. In the early 1990s, however, more base closures were announced. These included the Naval Training Center on the shore of San Diego Bay and Miramar Naval Air Station. The local political establishment, which was very conscious of the economic impact of military payrolls, was aghast at the idea of base closures and lobbied to prevent them. In the case of the Naval Training Center, they had to settle for the land; and the subsequent redevelopment turned out to be of more advantage to the developer than to the city. In the case of Miramar, they lobbied very hard to get a Marine Corps Air Station relocated from El Toro to Miramar, and in this they succeeded. In my opinion, it was one of the worst decisions local politicians have ever made: Orange County got a big chunk of prime land and San Diego got the Marines – and the noise from their helicopters, and their live-fire exercises, and their general attitude. What the city gave up was the only viable alternative site for its cramped civilian airport, a large open-space area that could have connected Mission Trails Regional Park with the Sycamore Canyon area south of Poway, and a large close-in area for residential and commercial development.

Of course, every earthly paradise has its flaws. In addition to the Marines, there is the homeless population. Like most – I assume, all – large American cities, San Diego has its share of people who are on the streets because they lack housing. Indeed, it probably has more than its share because of its mild climate – after all where would *you* rather sleep out in the open in January – Buffalo or San Diego? At least nobody freezes here. This situation dates back to the 1980s and hasn't improved much since. There are private agencies that do provide a certain amount of shelter and general support, but they can't take everybody. From time to time, local governments do something by way of providing shelter during the winter months, but their most characteristic response – in common with that of neighborhood associations – is to try to move the homeless population someplace else. And so, people continue to sleep under bridges, in doorways, and in unauthorized encampments in untended open space.

The local institutions of higher education have been a major part of San Diego's economic and demographic transformation. This has been particularly true of the city's two large public universities. The two San Diegos each has one. The University of California San Diego is located in La Jolla and has always seen itself as an elite research university. When I first arrived, UCSD was still pretty new and had hardly realized those ambitions – its chief claim to fame in those days was that it had hired the well-known Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse – but ample state funding, plenty of physical space, and a ruthless pursuit of research funds soon rectified the situation. UCSD is the sort of institution that tailors its academic programs to reflect research funding opportunities rather than the overall needs of society. For instance, it does not provide the full range of traditional engineering programs; rather, it has specialized in such "cutting-edge" disciplines as electrical engineering and earthquake engineering. It has always been the darling of the local establishment – and with good reason, since it has provided the foundation for San Diego's economic transformation, particularly the wireless communications and biotech sectors. Irwin Jacobs, the founder of Qualcomm, was a UCSD professor before he became a tech-industry rock star.

The other San Diego has San Diego State University, located beside Interstate 8 out toward the eastern edge of the city. SDSU is a much less glamorous, work-a-day institution. It is far the older than UCSD, having begun as a normal school in the late 1890s; over the years, it has evolved from a teachers college into a full-scale university – without much encouragement and in the face of occasional opposition. When I arrived in 1976, it had already achieved university status, at least in name, but was primarily a teaching institution. In the early 1960s, California had adopted a Masterplan for Higher Education that attempted to rationalize higher education by creating three different sectors with distinct missions: the University of California system, comprised of elite institutions focusing on research, graduate study, and the prestigious professions such as medicine and law; the California State University system, comprised of four-year institutions focusing on undergraduate education and the more "practical" professions and academic skills; and the Community College System, comprised of two-year institutions serving as feeders for the other two systems as well as providing instruction in a variety of vocational fields. The underlying philosophy was that specialization would enhance efficiency, and hence economy; one of the goals was to make higher education widely-available by making it cheap. In the 1960s and 1970s this goal was realized fairly well: officially, there was no such thing as in-state tuition, and the academic fees that substituted for it were quite affordable. Among the practical results of this officially-decreed specialization were that per-student state funding for the University of California was far more generous than that for the other two systems and that California State University campuses were forbidden to offer doctoral programs.

A major problem with the California Masterplan was that its philosophy of efficiency through specialization ran afoul of the cultural and professional realities of academia. The most powerful of these is that academic prestige is dependent on the quality (and quantity) of research or scholarship produced by an individual or institution. This is in part because it is easier to judge the quality of research than that of teaching: one can add up external research funding and count publications; quality is ensured by the review processes for research proposals and publications, and there is a distinct pecking order in terms of the prestige of academic journals. Meanwhile, teaching evaluations are largely subjective and heavily dependent on the opinions of current students, who may be influenced more by the difficulty of the learning process than by its relative success or failure. The result has been that almost all four-year institutions – particularly those that style themselves universities – aspire to be research institutions and design their tenure and promotions policies accordingly. Individual faculty, meanwhile, realize that even if their own campuses do not impose "publish or perish" criteria, their professional mobility depends on research funding and publication, and consequently pressure academic administrators to demand and facilitate research.

I have said that two of the three universities I have been associated with were plagued by a sense of inferiority and frustrated aspiration. The sense of inferiority was strongest at San Diego State, for obvious reasons. Vanderbilt was an elite institution that didn't quite live up to its ambitions: it was a very good university with a considerable reputation, but it wasn't world class. San Diego State, on the other hand, was distinctly plebian. It had ambitions to join the big time, but it was nowhere near, and in order to get there, it had to overcome its own academic ineptness as well as internal and external opposition to the very idea that it would ever be more than a humble teaching institution, turning mediocre students into moderately-educated citizens. It is true that San Diego State always considered itself to be the flagship campus of the CSU system – a claim that might have been contested by several other campuses and must have offended all of them – but that wasn't saying much. Over time, however, it has made considerable strides in overcoming its former reputation: that it was a cross between a party school and a commuter campus.

San Diego State was still in a state of transition when I got there. In the 1960s, it had hired faculty who lacked doctorates and had tenured and promoted them on the basis of minimal effort. At that time, living and breathing and keeping out of serious trouble for three years was enough to receive tenure and another three years of the same enough to earn promotion to full professor. Many of these old-timers fully embraced the idea that SDSU was a teaching institution, and they resented the idea that researchers should get any special resources or treatment. The normal teaching load was twelve units per semester (by system-wide decree), and they particularly opposed researchers' receiving any release from teaching duties unless it was paid for directly through research grants. By 1976, however, the institution as a whole was committed to requiring faculty to do research. This position was supported not only by the campus administration but also by the majority of the senior faculty leaders.

Faced with the conflict between such ambitions and the realities of meager resources and statewide policies that were indifferent or even hostile to research involvement, the local administration adopted what it called an "entrepreneurial" approach. This meant that if you were a junior faculty member, you were expected to do research – to get funding and publications – and woe betide you if you failed, but you weren't to expect any help or support from the administrators. You want us to make contacts with agencies and businesses and encourage them to fund research? Not our job – you go and hustle them yourself. You want release time above and beyond what you can buy so you can do research? Well, it's against system policy, but we'll look the other way if you can convince your department to go along with it – but you have to fight that battle yourself; and yes, we know that you're at a competitive disadvantage because UC doesn't charge sponsors for faculty time: their faculty have lighter teaching loads because research is considered a part of their normal duties – too bad you work for us instead of them. You got funded and now you want some space to house your project? Congratulations – but sorry, we don't have any vacant space. And so it went.

By my day, most junior faculty at San Diego State wanted to do research; we were products of elite doctoral programs. The top programs thought that there was no such thing as too many graduate students, and they turned out enough PhDs that places like San Diego State could recruit from the best programs. And graduates of top doctoral programs both wanted and expected to do research. It was what we had been trained to do; my case was exceptional in that I actually had teaching experience when San Diego State hired me. And we had all been brought up to believe that the advancement of knowledge was the chief business of real universities and the primary concern of distinguished faculty members. Most of my professors at Berkeley didn't even teach undergraduates – that was the job of teaching assistants and lecturers like me. And we were fully aware of the professional mobility issue: if you ever wanted to work anywhere else, you needed a good research record.

And eventually, San Diego State succeeded in turning itself into a research university: maybe not world-class, but distinctly respectable. At least three developments were important in this transformation. The first was that the region's population growth was such that enrollments began to exceed the institution's capacity. At first, the result was simply overcrowding and ever-lengthening times to graduation, as students were unable to schedule full course loads. But following a severe budget crisis in the early 1990s, the campus received permission to limit enrollments. The result was that San Diego State was able to be selective, and this, combined with whatever reputation for quality it already had, began to attract even more applications for admission. The more applicants, the more selective it could be, and eventually this had a positive impact on the quality of undergraduate students.

The second was that the relentless focus on research began to pay off, and as San Diego State's reputation as a research institution improved, so did the quality of faculty applicants. The effectiveness of new faculty in playing the research game was also enhanced by the fact that over the years the major research institutions began to produce a glut of PhDs – it was no longer common for people to get faculty positions immediately after graduation, as I had; now most new faculty members had spent several years as post-doctoral research fellows, and so had gained considerable experience in how to write proposals and papers.

Finally, the campus administration, spurred on by increasingly stingy state budgets, learned how to do big-time fund raising. This led to endowed faculty positions that could attract distinguished senior faculty from elsewhere, funding for specialized academic programs, and even modest contributions to the construction of new physical facilities. As a result, San Diego State has moved steadily upwards in the national rankings of universities published, for instance, by *U. S. News and World Report*; at the same time, though, it has moved in the direction of UCSD in terms of developing academic programs based on perceived research funding availability rather than overall societal need.

Settled Down

As we have seen, during my early years in San Diego, my social life was rather full and often exciting, although not always satisfactory. But all's well that ends well: I married the right woman, and that's the best you can ask of a comedy. Through marriage, I gained an extended family that I have always enjoyed being around, and at first, Ellen and I were able to keep up our church-related contacts. But eventually people moved away, and we – and some of them – had children. In our case, our daughter Esther was born in 1982 and our son James in 1987. So between the time demands of marriage and a family and people moving away, my social circle slowly dwindled. As more time went on, I found myself with leadership responsibilities at work and church, and learned that authority complicates intimacy: it is hard to maintain close relationships in a hierarchical setting – you make decisions for what you believe is the good of the group or cause as a whole, and you lose friends in the process. And finally, we are reduced to joining formal organizations – clubs and societies – just to make social contact with others. Over the years, I sense that I have become more and more isolated. A couple of years after I retired, I did join the San Diego Audubon Society to pursue my interest in birdwatching in a more social setting. I have enjoyed it, and I have learned a lot in terms birding skills, but the impact on my social life has been pretty marginal.

I have lived in the same immediate neighborhood ever since I moved out of my first apartment on Streamview Drive – and even then, I moved only about a mile. When I came back from Northern California in the fall of 1977, I rented a brand new two-bedroom unfurnished apartment in a building on 56th Street, one block south of El Cajon Boulevard, and set about furnishing it. I fixed up one of the bedrooms as an office. I bought a few pieces new, but I got most of the furniture used through want ads. Also, I built a bookcase for the office with the help of the furniture-making student that I have already mentioned and the room divider for the oversized living room that figured in the story of my courtship of Ellen. Shortly before the wedding, I also bought an unfinished desk and dresser for her and finished them myself. After about a year on 56th Street, we decided that it was time to buy a house and started looking for something in the general neighborhood. One criterion was that at least one of us should be within walking distance of work.

The reason for this was that I had gotten into the habit of walking to work. This started when I was dating Ellen; it really began with jogging – she jogged, and I decided to take it up. At first, I would drive to work so I could get home quickly and go out and run. But by the spring of 1979, the Iranian Revolution had taken place, and we were in the midst of the second energy crisis. I had trips to make to Riverside and the availability of gas was uncertain. So one day, I thought, "Why am I driving to work so I can go out and run for exercise when I get home when I could be walking to work for exercise?" Not to mention saving gas for the weekend. So after that I started walking to work, but I continued to jog as well. Over the years these became habits: I walked to work most days up until the time I retired, and I still run three times a week. These activities have made me a local celebrity: neighbors that I don't really know are forever telling me that they recognize me as the guy that used to walk to work or as the jogger.

Anyway, for a couple of months or so we read want ads and went out to look at houses that were for sale. We saw some interesting places, but none in our price range that seemed ideal. Finally, one day I was out walking and spotted a for-sale sign on a house at 58th Street and Trojan, only four blocks from where we were living. The owner was selling without a broker. It was a really nice house, the price was very reasonable, and we had gotten there first, so we grabbed it. I sometimes wonder if the owners didn't suspect that they had underpriced it when the first prospective buyer who looked at it immediately agreed to their price. There was a catch, of course – there always is. In this case the catch was that they were selling because they were moving to a new house in North County that was not quite ready for occupancy. We agreed to terms in September, but the house wasn't going to be ready for us to move in until sometime in December. In between came the hassle of taking out a mortgage and going through escrow – at the end of which, I vowed I would never buy another house (and I haven't).

It's a good house, but of course, it's needed its share of attention over the years. An immediate problem was that the room we planned to use as an office (and that had been the bedroom of the former owners' teenage daughter) had a shocking pink carpet and pink-figured wall paper. That had to go – and was replaced with something much more sedate. Otherwise, the fence around the back yard has had to be replaced twice – and the first time involved the construction of a low concrete-block retaining wall; one reason the old fence had rotted out was that someone had used it as a retaining wall for a layer of topsoil they had added to the backyard. While I was building the wall, my son was born, and we decided that we would eventually need another bedroom; this resulted in the construction of a huge master bedroom over the garage and sorely tested my resolve never to buy another house – I concluded that remodeling was even worse than going through escrow! There have also been window replacements, kitchen and bathroom remodels, a major overhaul of the interior, solar panel installation, and most recently, a make-over of the back yard, featuring brick walkways, raised beds for the garden, a drip irrigation system, and native plants for most of the area to cut down on watering.

When we bought the place, the backyard came equipped with a collection of fruit trees. There was a plum tree back in the corner, an apple tree, a peach tree, a grapefruit tree, a Valencia orange tree, and an avocado tree. About all that survives is the orange and avocado trees; both have excellent fruit and bear well. The apple tree is still alive, but the apples are so-so, and the tree doesn't produce much. After the wall-and-fence project, I planted a grapevine and some blackberries outside the fence; the grape produced for a few years and died; the blackberries did well for many years but eventually died – probably from drought. Most recently, I planted what was supposed to be a Bearss lime that turned out to be some kind of super-seedy lemon and, later, a dwarf Bearss lime that really is one. The lemon had fruit on it when it came from the nursery (which is how I found out that it's not really a Bearss lime) but otherwise, neither tree bore fruit until this year.

The first year we were in the house, I planted a garden in the backyard. Over the years, I've tried to grow all sorts of vegetables, some of which have done better than others. I've had my best success with tomatoes, hot peppers, and zucchini. I've planted a full garden every year except 2016, when I was redoing the backyard and had space for only some peppers and tomatoes. As I have mentioned, the make-over of the area included raised garden beds and drip irrigation; it also resulted in increased garden space, so I have planted several new crops – most notably, greens such as collards, kale, and chard.

So now I had a wife and a family and even a house with fruit trees and a garden. I was getting on with life. But I still had an academic career to deal with. When I arrived at San Diego State, I set out to do research, while also developing a total of six courses – two undergraduate and four graduate – pretty much from scratch and teaching a couple of others. I quickly realized that the sort of research I had done for my thesis didn't have much future – writing about transportation politics was a good way to make enemies. Not only that, but I didn't have much luck in carving papers out of my dissertation. This meant that I was not only starting in a less than ideal environment for doing research, but that by my former independence, I had blown the momentum that most new PhDs carried into their first faculty position – I wasn't working on a hot topic, and I wasn't able to repackage my thesis results to get a couple of quick journal publications. Some of my closest friends at Berkeley had been doing theoretical work related to mass transit, and although I hadn't been directly involved, I was pretty familiar with what they were doing. It wasn't the sort of thing that was likely to get funded, but it could – and eventually did – lead to some publications. Meanwhile, I was pursuing what you might call targets of opportunity, writing funding proposals and submitting papers – mostly without success – related to any likely-looking topic. Finally, a geography professor and I did succeed in getting funded for a study about – of all things – transit access to beaches, funded by – of all agencies – the California Sea Grant Program.

With all of this, I did succeed in getting tenure and in due course, in getting promoted to full professor. But San Diego State had been a bit of a culture shock, and for the first few years, I kept a lookout for job possibilities elsewhere. I wanted, I said to myself, to work at a "real university." But there were a couple of difficulties with this idea – in the first place, my lackluster research record might be enough to succeed at San Diego State, but it wasn't likely to lead to any job offers from big-time research universities. Also, at that time, my church situation was good – so good, that I didn't want to leave. And, as time went on, I started to put down roots: I got married, we bought a house, then we had kids – it just got harder and harder to think about leaving, so eventually I stopped doing so.

As San Diego State changed, so did my relationship to it. For one thing, I began to move into positions of leadership. Traditionally, at least in the College of Engineering, Department Chairmanships rotated on a three-year basis. Occasionally somebody would overstay the three years, and that usually led to trouble. By 1986, when I had been there ten years and was recently promoted to Full Professor, I was appointed Department Chair. I served in that capacity for my allotted three years, by which time I was more than ready to move on and become just another senior faculty member, without the aggravations of office politics – not that one ever escapes entirely from those. Meanwhile, I had become active in committee work at the University level, and eventually chaired a couple of different committees at that level.

At about the same time – after the heat was off, you might say – my research career suddenly blossomed. I transitioned from doing mostly theoretical work related to mass transit to doing mostly empirical work related to freeway traffic flow, ramp metering, and related topics. In this I was exploiting the fact that the San Diego Caltrans district was something of a pioneer in the automatic collection of freeway traffic data; most of the detectors had been installed in conjunction with a traffic-responsive ramp metering system. I had access to what was, for a time at least, one of the most complete and accurate traffic data bases in existence, and this allowed me to investigate several questions of general interest related to traffic flow. And I finally learned how to get papers published. I can't tell you what the secret was, because it seemed to be more of an intuitive sense of how to proceed, but from struggling to get anything published, I suddenly got to the point of getting almost everything I submitted published. I can think of only a couple of failures in the last twenty years of my career. As a result of all this, I got to be one of the players in the rather narrow field of traffic flow at a national and even international level. Not one of the superstars, surely, but definitely somebody who was known. They still send me papers to review, even after almost ten years of retirement.

Such reputation as I had beyond the campus was enhanced by the fact that I also published a textbook intended for the (usually required) undergraduate course in transportation engineering that most civil engineering programs offer. This began with a collection of handouts that my predecessors and I at Berkeley had developed for the course I taught when I was a lecturer there. After I came to San Diego State, I gradually revised and added to these, and eventually – because it was cheaper and more convenient than handing them out piecemeal – had them collected together and printed for sale to my students in lieu of a textbook. Finally, I decided to rewrite them and put them together in a more connected narrative. It was at this stage that that the work fell into the hands of a textbook publisher's representative, and I was offered a contract. After considerable expansion and revision – not to mention hassles with the book production process – McGraw-Hill published the book. A couple of years later, I revised it and it came out in a second edition. It sold OK, although I think they may have been hoping for more, and I still get royalty checks twice a year, although the book has been out of print for nearly ten years and is out-of-date by now. But I'm hardly getting rich off it – I doubt that everything I have been paid would amount to $10/hour for the time involved.

Well, with success came a certain amount of contentment, I guess. I stopped looking for jobs elsewhere just about the time I got to where I could have gotten one. And there was a certain amount of recognition at the campus level. Every year each college designates one of its faculty members as its outstanding faculty member. This involves, as best I recall, a check for about $50 and a certificate – and you get to go to a football game for free and have your name read over the PA system at halftime. I was the outstanding faculty member for the College of Engineering twice. So far as I know, I'm the only one who ever got it twice – but that was politics, of course.

The time was when my church situation was so good that it helped to keep me in San Diego when my job was a source of discontent. My ecclesiastical career developed in ways that were parallel to my academic one, but the changes the years have brought to the La Mesa Church of Christ have (alas!) been very different from those they have brought San Diego State. I began to play a formal leadership role in the church at about the same time that I did at San Diego State. I was appointed a Deacon in 1985 and an Elder in 1998, a position I still hold. In contrast to San Diego State University, which has made steady progress in realizing its aspirations, the La Mesa Church of Christ has declined in numbers and influence over the period of my leadership. Where my academic career brought increasing recognition and satisfaction, my career as a church leader has been mostly a lesson in humility. As a Deacon I had several assignments; these included oversight of a singles ministry – the descendant of the one I was instrumental in founding back in 1977 – and later a more general role as Deacon in charge of outreach and then a role in helping members discover their "gifts" and placing them as workers in various church activities and projects. I don't think I was very effective in any of these, but the congregation eventually selected me as an Elder anyway. In that role, I have learned just how easy it is to do harm and how hard it is to do good. But I keep trying. Despite the decline in membership, we now have updated facilities (courtesy of the income provided by leasing the building to a public charter school) and a much clearer idea of our specific mission, which involves service and outreach to children and teenagers and their families. Meanwhile, I have served as a teacher of adult Bible classes of various sorts and have gained something of a reputation in that role.

The decline in membership and attendance at church over the past forty years has played a significant part in the narrowing of my social life. Some old friends have died, but more have left the congregation and drifted out of my life – out of sight, out of mind. It sometimes seems that the people I feel closest to are the first to become dissatisfied and leave. I don't know – maybe it's my combination of rebelliousness – that attracts me to outsiders or people who are moving on – and my stubbornness, which causes me to stay put in the face of adversity or my own dissatisfaction.

I retired from San Diego State in 2009, and now I do this and that: some reading and some writing (including pieces like this), some gardening, some tending of the backyard, some church work, some walking and hiking, some birding. Tomorrow, who knows?

THE SENSE OF PLACE

As I think back, I realize just how subjective the sense of place is. Yes, my reactions to places are influenced by their physical and cultural features, but my life has been intertwined with my surroundings, so that any account about where I have lived is necessarily also an account of how I lived there. And so, I've been telling stories. Those stories are about the places, but they are also about me. Whether the part about me will be of interest to anybody except maybe some of my friends and family, I don't know. Maybe it will be a source for my obituary when the time comes, although it isn't really a complete account of my life or even its most important events and circumstances.

Because our lives are different, we all have different reactions to our surroundings. And this may account for the observation that in a few American places – I characterized them as “isolated backwaters” in the introduction – people have retained what local historians have perceived as a sense of place and a love of the land. These places had declining populations – they were places that a lot of people had been only too happy to leave. Perhaps one sort of love of place is born out of adversity – “if we don’t like it here, why haven’t we left, too?”

That brings us back to the ideas that triggered this memoir: the ideas that America has become homogeneous and that Americans are “placeless.” It seems to me that, on the contrary, the distinguishing characteristic of America and its culture is tremendous diversity. This is a big country; I have seen only a little of it and lived in less. Physically, it is full of mountains and plains, forests and farms, deserts and swamps, megalopolises and wildernesses. Culturally, it is the meeting place of all the peoples of the world and yet it is unique. This is true despite fast-food restaurants, chain stores, internet commerce, mass entertainment, and tract houses. Its homogeneity is superficial and mostly commercial. Once you get below that surface, there is a myriad of worldviews, lifestyles, and belief systems. In many cases, these correlate with place, but no place is truly homogeneous even within itself.

Nowadays, we worry not so much about homogeneity as divisiveness: we live in the chaos of alternative realities and “tribal” hostilities. But these too are superficial and (in this case) mostly political. Our real lives are lived day-to-day in real places, each of which has its own blend of physical beauty – be it lush or stark – and its unique cultural flavor. Let us enjoy them and give thanks.